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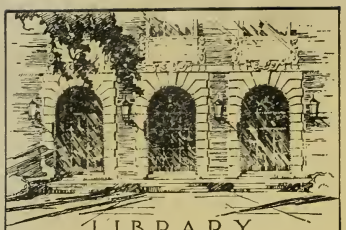

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MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

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MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," "STRAIGHTFORWARD," ETC.

"Have we not all, amid life's petty strife,
Some pure ideal of a noble life
That once seemed possible—and just within our reach?
We lost it. . . .
But still our place is kept, and it will wait
Ready for us to fill it, soon or late."

ADELAIDE PROCTOR.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.
1880.

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BOOK THE FIRST.

THE HOUSE WITH GOLDEN GABLES.

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MRS. DENYS OF COTE.

CHAPTER I.

MISS DELIA—MISTRESS PRIDE.

"My brain, methinks, is like an hour-glass,
Wherein imagination runs like sands,
Filling up time; but they are turned and turned,
So that I know not what to stay upon,
And less to put in act." BEN JONSON.

THERE is no change in the picture that any day in the year makes of Rood Hill at Auldcaster though we put back the clock half a century or so. The street is broad, and rises in a gradual ascent from the market-place to the parish church—a noble church, having a square tower of great massiveness, and a

peal of eight bells, called the finest bells in the county. About half-way up the hill stands the White Hart, the principal inn of the town, and on the other side, looking north, is a timbered house of the seventeenth century. Each upper story overhangs the one below, and the framework of the black cross-beams in the ochre-plastered walls is shown throughout. It has five gables towards the street, on which falls the warm glow of the summer sun at setting, and hence its name of the House with Golden Gables. There is no other house above it until the rectory is reached—nothing but a brick wall enclosing a garden, of which the antiquity may be guessed at by the grand cedars that rise above it. Beyond the church and the rectory the hill merges into country. The land is glebe, and the slow-growing town has grown in other directions.

The House with Golden Gables was in the occupation of Judge Daventry, her grandfather, when Miss Delia—Mistress Pride—was born there. She was his first grandchild, the first child of his only son. The Daventrys were an Auldcaster family of long and honourable traditions. The judge had retired from the bench before he had earned his pension. His health had broken prematurely under the strain of work too incessant; and the physicians promising him a lengthened life, with ease and leisure, he had chosen that, and comparatively straitened means, rather than a lengthened service, with its certain penalty and doubtful gain. He had bred his son to the law, had countenanced his early marriage, and invited the young couple to share his home. They were cheerful company in the country in intervals of business. The baby was born while her father was absent on circuit at

Beauminster. He was back at Auldcaster for her christening in September. She was christened Delia, and they made a great day of it. Holy Cross Day was the day.

The rector who christened the little Delia was a Daventry, and his presentation to Auldcaster, and his arrival with his bride, was a welcome addition to the circle of relations and dear friends of whom the judge was the centre. Miss Delia was the forerunner of a numerous progeny. Babies soon ceased to be phenomena in the House with Golden Gables. It was full of them, and all boys except Miss Delia. The rectory more than rivalled its fecundity. But the Daventrys were a good stock, and Auldcaster was apt to say that there could not be too many of them.

Another cousin of the name was master of the grammar-school where all the boys had their early education. Later, one went to Eton

and two to Westminster, and two went to the sea—the Church, the Law, and the Navy were the professions that the Daventrys favoured. The girls had their education at home, and the holidays, when the brothers and cousins came back, were seasons of great jollity.

Simplicity of living prevailed amongst the long-seated gentry in the neighbourhood of Auldcaster much later than amongst the newly enriched generation who, in more progressive parts, were already pushing them from their places. The House with Golden Gables had a spacious freedom in its large rooms and broad staircases, but no luxury of ornament or pomp of furniture. The oak boards were dark with age and friction, but there was a scarcity of carpets everywhere. On the staircase none, in the dining-parlour none, in the judge's study none, in the ante-room none; and in the withdrawing-room, as the great parlour

was called, only Indian matting laid before the hearth, and grandmamma's sofa, and mamma's writing-table, but it had a rare comfort in its homeliness. The grotesque china whim had infected some lady of the house in Queen Anne's time. There were jars in the corners big enough to pot a baby, and bowls and jugs and cups and ugly images showing themselves off on black velvet shelves. A Japanese folding-screen survived from the same date, and on the walls hung many fine portraits of various dates ; for it had been a custom of the Daventrys to perpetuate the faces of their distinguished men and beautiful women. The glory of the house was one of these : a Vandyke portrait that went in the family by the name of the French Madam. It hung above the fireplace in the withdrawing-room —a formal, youthful figure in a dress of amethyst velvet, with a collar of pearls, and

a band of the same in the flowing auburn hair. The hands were crossed lightly in front, and displayed a wedding-ring and some very splendid jewels. The features were fine and delicate, and the colouring was lovely, but the countenance was without charm, pervaded by a melancholy and haughty humour.

Miss Delia's eyes had opened to the world in a bed-chamber hung with unbleached linen worked all over in worsted devices of trees and birds, and the same antiquated drapery still adorned her mother's chamber when she was a girl grown up—adorned her own chamber too, which was made beautiful in a primitive fashion because she was beautiful and good and very precious, the one sweet daughter of the house. She was the mark of love and homage from her birth. The boys called her Mistress Pride, but in pure fun and affection, because she had a likeness to the exquisite

French Madam; and the lofty petulant airs with which she queened it amused both boys and men. The judge was the only one who ever took her to task, and he was, perhaps, the most devoted to her, as appreciating her fine qualities the most justly.

She had not many faults, and what she had were the flaws of a strong character. She was imperious and exacting, but with a natural inclination towards goodness, and was always ready, even eager, to deny herself to do a kind or charitable action. Amongst the girls she was allowed the first place as the one of most excellent ability, though she did not possess the lighter accomplishments in the same perfection as Fanny, Grace, and Emmeline at the rectory. The sole distinctive feminine taste that she cultivated sedulously was for needlework, and her embroidery-needle she used with a most patient skill and ingenuity

to enrich her dress. She delighted in grand attire, and the grandest became her, as she liked to prove on festive occasions when she got leave to equip herself out of an old chest where reposed in tarnished lustre the court-costumes and bride-clothes of her fore-mothers, going back to the days of sacque and far-dingale. Then the elders would signify their tender and gracious approval, and the boys would pay her their compliments all round. Vanity was quiescent in her, for she was inured to admiration, but being called Mistress Pride was sweetest flattery from lips that loved her, because the original was glorious in her beauty, and she knew no desire yet so warm as the desire to rival her.

With a little more knowledge came a change of sentiment.

One day, when she was about sixteen years old, she said to her grandmother, standing

contemplatively before the Vandyke portrait: "Gran'ma, this lady was not French. She was born in this very house where I was born."

"Little girls should not ask questions," replied the old lady, ignoring the fact that the little girl asked no question, but made a statement.

The reply was meant to silence her, and it was effectual; but when next her brothers cried out on her as Mistress Pride, she cried out on them again: "I will not be called after that loathly lady!" and voice, gesture, accent, were all of the fiercest repulsion.

The boys struck comical attitudes of terror and dismay, the judge clapt his newspaper down on his knee, grandmamma looked over her spectacles aghast, mamma exclaimed: "My love! my love!"

Delia stood tall and towering, blushing

defiance, amazed, angry with herself, trembling fast into tears, into timidity.

"It is an unworthy name to give your sister," said the judge with a significant nod to the boys, who vanished.

He resumed his study of the debates, not altogether undisturbed. Grandmamma's hands shook as she plied her knitting-needles. Mamma toyed with her pen as if what she had been about to write to her absent husband were scared out of her recollection.

"Delia, who has talked to you of the French Madam?" her mother asked her presently in private.

"Abby," said she; for she was too courageous to prevaricate. But the colour came hot into her face.

That was enough. Abby took her departure from the House with Golden Gables. She had done long and faithful service there,

and the judge pensioned her. She went too far off to pervert or instruct Miss Delia any more. Only the other day Delia was a child to them all—a simple, innocent, lovely child—but from this time her elders realised that the workings of her heart and mind had ceased to be an open study. She had no stint of that curiosity which betrayed the mother of us all. She looked and saw, heard and understood, thought and discovered, as Nature taught and guided her. Some of her discoveries she kept to herself, and the name of Mistress Pride, forbidden now, seemed to match with her mien and air better than ever.

"Give her more occupation; give her more amusement. Why does she not study and exercise her mind? She is waiting too soon for life to begin," said the rector, sought to for advice by Delia's mother.

When he had examined her for confirmation the year before, he had found her less well informed of her duties, moral and religious, than some of her humbler contemporaries. He had found also ample room for improvement in her general education. He warned those who were responsible that they were taking too much for granted of Miss Delia's powers, and mentioned the fable of the hare and the tortoise. He mentioned also that nothing keeps down the growth of weeds in the youthful soul more effectually than the steady training of the fruit-bearing, active virtues. In their immense admiration of their beautiful daughter her parents lightly regarded these admonitions of their spiritual pastor and hers. He spoke his judgment, and had done. Her mother remembered later when the opportunity of docile girlishness was past retrieval.

The young Daventrys were so large a circle that they did not want society beyond themselves, and thus Miss Delia failed of one of the most essential parts of education. She missed the joys of youthful friendship and the discipline of youthful collisions. She lived at home without a rival, without an equal amongst her companions, who were just her cousins, who confessed her superiority and felt her oppressive.

At nineteen Miss Delia was a will and an influence in the house—a strong will and a pervading influence. She had continued to follow her own ways of working and playing, and had been too much indulged in them to be diverted into other ways by any hint that other ways might be better. Schemes were proposed for her improvement, but she waived them, or despised them. It had begun to be acknowledged that Delia would do as she

liked, and would not bear control. Her mother thought tenderly that what she liked was almost always becoming, and said that she had a fine discernment in choosing what was right and fit to do. The judge as tenderly demurred. Every rule has its exceptions. Delia's notions were mostly evolved from her own consciousness. Her opportunities of fresh observation and comparison were few, and what was familiar she made little account of. Otherwise she had rare examples. What she mused of when she sat so many hours plying her needle for the flowering of a petticoat or a gown, who shall tell? She was not intellectual. She did not read, had no store of fine conceptions of fine authors to revolve. She was not emotional, had no cud to chew of sweet or bitter experience. Perhaps she built castles in the air, and was herself the illuminating presence of every chamber. Or

perhaps she thought of nothing. Yet when she rose from her favourite seat in the recessed window at the end of the withdrawing-room, and stept statelily across the floor, the judge, observing her with pathetic shrewdness, saw that the young creature was rapt away by delusive fancies, enacting some splendid part to the deafening applause of her own imagination. These were her glorious moments, real and unreal as when a lunatic dreams himself a king.

One day her eldest brother Walter, the boy from Eton, came suddenly upon her descending the staircase, wide enough to drive a coach. She held her scanty dress like a royal train, she pointed her foot, straightened her back, stiffened her neck, tossed up her head with ineffable airs.

"Room there for Mistress Pride!" whispered the lad, and bowed low with mimic reverence.

Delia started, almost imperceptibly modified her majesty of gait, and passed him with a sweeping indignation. She was vexed and mortified because Wat had caught her playing the tragedy queen. Wat forgot it the next hour, but Delia did not forget it, nor that he had mocked her. She loved him the less for it, and she feared him.

Her propensity to sumptuous reverie increased. Daily the bare chambers of the old house were re-hung with fantastic tapestry of her weaving out of dreams, while her perceptions of pleasure in the world of nature remained faint and cold. The singing of birds, the scent of flowers and their loveliness, the rapturous morning and evening glory, stirred in her no fibres of delight at all. On the other hand, she was deeply interested in the names and circumstances of men and women of condition round about. When they were talked of

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she listened with an eager spirit of inquiry, but if the conversation turned upon books, or things, or public events, her attention soon flagged. The other girls were happy in pairs, but Delia seemed best pleased in her own society. Even her mother stood outside her confidence. Delia told her nothing of what was in her mind. She had no pernicious secrets, but those who dearly loved her were grieved by her reserve, which was a growing habit. When gently urged to talk, to say something, she would ask with a quiet surprise: "What shall I talk about?"

"Let her alone. She has nothing to say," the judge interposed once, hearing her thus answer her grandmother. He sat in reflection a long while after, and when she had gone out he muttered with a profound sigh: "God pity her, poor thing!" as if he foresaw her loneliness of heart in days to come.

Another time he remarked that Cricket would be a saving grace to his sister. Cricket was Edward, the last-born son of the family ; a wistful-eyed atom of deformity, warped out of shape by an accident in his babyhood. Delia had a tenderness for him such as she bestowed on no other person. He was very dependent on tenderness, but uncomplaining, of a lively temper and keen wit. Now and then the rough, healthy brothers would try to amuse him, but he would soon beg to be left to sister. Then Delia, with a conscious joy and triumph, would lift him in her arms, and carry him out into the garden, and walk between the long rows of espaliers till they were both weary. He was easier in his wheeled chair, but it was a loving favour to be carried in the arms of sister. When their mother saw them making this procession, and Delia's face bending over the child, she said

to herself that, by and by, all would come right with her daughter, when the magical touch of love should unseal and set flowing the hidden treasures of her large and generous heart.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW VERSION OF AN OLD SONG.

"The merchant, to secure his treasure,
Conveys it in a borrowed name;
Euphelia serves to grace my measure,
But Chloe is my real flame.

My lyre I tune, my voice I raise,
But with my numbers mix my sighs,
And whilst I sing Euphelia's praise,
I fix my soul on Chloe's eyes.

Fair Chloe blushed: Euphelia frowned:
I sung and gazed: I played and trembled:
And Venus to the Loves around
Remarked how ill we all dissembled."

PRIOR.

BUT twenty years old struck upon Miss Delia, and no suitor had come knocking yet at the door of the House with Golden Gables.

"I suppose we shall be courted some day,"

she said once, thinking aloud before her cousin Fanny.

Fanny hoped so, indeed — Fanny was eighteen, and had the prettiest dimple in the sweetest cheek in the world.

The girls were standing under the cedars in the garden. It was Delia's birthday, and the occasion was being celebrated by a general muster of the Daventrys and their nearest friends. The lady of the day appeared dressed in white, and was in a humour of lovely condescension. Every one had brought her flowers or gifts, and when these had been presented, and the customary congratulations offered and accepted, it happened that she was left with Fanny alone, in the green shadow where she had stood to receive them. And so left for a perceptible interval of time. She fell into a muse, and was not more than half-conscious of what she said in self-revelation.

Fanny did not know that her Cousin Delia ever dreamed of Love. But, indeed, her busy fancy went often to his encounter, in a grand masque, with flourish of trumpets, and pomp and universal homage. She would be wooed with other charms than lovers' simple vows.

Fanny had a meek, shy wish to be elsewhere, but she was too kind to leave Delia by herself. The elders were exchanging family chat—the youngsters were waxing noisy at some game. Many groups and pairs passed by them. At length Cricket was wheeled into the refuge of shade to his sister. Fanny might have gone then, and not have been missed by Delia, but the person who had wheeled up Cricket robbed her of the wish to move. He was a fine young gentleman of five or six and twenty, a sanguine-tempered person who believed and confessed that life was not made for

melancholy. Fanny complimented his arrival with a delicate blush. Delia lifted her head with the stately grace of Juno, and thanked him for his care of Cricket.

This fine young gentleman was Mr. James Herrick of Knowle, commonly called Jem Herrick, the third son of Sir John Herrick of Danesmore. Jem was born with the benediction of fortune. He inherited a vigorous frame and genial constitution from his parents. They had given him, besides, a sound country-home breeding, and his education at Westminster and Oxford. Then the young man had read for the bar, and generally amused himself with foreign travel and study to the age of four-and-twenty, drawing his funds from his god-mother, a dowager with a handsome property at her own disposal. It was an understood thing that James Herrick was to have it, and when this lady died in the

fulness of years and honours, she was able to congratulate herself that Jem was old enough to take to Knowle. He had taken to it very kindly. It gave him a position in the county, and invested him with all the duties, privileges, and responsibilities of a considerable landowner. The house at Knowle was famous and picturesque, and in the judgment of the neighbours wanted nothing but a mistress to make it perfect. But Jem Herrick seemed in no haste to find her. He had been master there eighteen months, and was still a prize to be won.

As Miss Delia thanked Cricket's protector he bowed with alacrity, then stood for a minute modestly abashed, recovered himself with a glance in Fanny's eyes, and on a word of encouragement broke into conversation. He directed it entirely to Delia, only from time to time including Fanny in a kind look of

reference. Fanny's voice was not heard, but Delia spoke as one having power and authority to hold men listening. It was, indeed, wonderful how well she talked when she had an audience that she desired to impress. Many of the guests in the garden that afternoon observed her, and some who loved her, and some who did not, drew the like conclusion, and whispered, or more discreetly thought, that there would be wedding-news at Knowle erelong. And Jem Herrick gave them reason enough. He launched out with an eloquent tongue in description of his travels and adventures, and with his manly figure, his frank countenance, and spirited air and gestures, was a fair mark for any young lady's fancy. Delia brightened into responsive animation—it was almost a rivalry of wits. Fanny, in soft eclipse, contributed nothing but now and then a shyly mirthful smile and a timid,

blithe look out of her doves' eyes, which Jem Herrick never failed to appropriate.

Similar scenes had been enacted before, and were enacted many times again in the weeks that followed. Mr. James Herrick greatly affected that old garden which was in common between the rectory and the House with Golden Gables. Knowle was but three miles from Auldcaster, and that was a most delightful summer out-of-doors. Under the cedars was pleasanter than any parlour. The young man had no company at home, and it was natural that he should seek it abroad. He was always welcome, and welcome to everybody except, perhaps, to Cricket. That child liked to absorb his sister in silence all to himself; and when Mr. James Herrick came, she was changed as by enchantment; she grew vivacious, and would hold forth on a score of topics that did not concern him.

Possibly the reason why the rest assumed that Jem Herrick came for Delia was because Delia so undoubtingly assumed the case herself. None but the jealous little observer in the wheeled chair perceived differently, unless the judge did, and the judge was not the man to betray it, if he discerned what the lovers' eyes said to each other. Fanny was gentle and retiring, and Jem was no more crafty than his conscience excused. Delia met him with self-possession and confidence of her acknowledged superiority. She in no wise feared him, or flattered him, or idealised him. She approved him, she believed that he approved her, and was willing to be desired. Fanny had little or nothing at his service but her smiles, her blushes, and a sweet good-night or good-morning. She often sat by, seemingly disregarded; but if, by chance, she went away, Jem soon grew restless, uneasy; he lingered

as though loth to go, but his mind was absent, let Delia be ever so gracious. It was Fanny he loved, longed for, waited for.

And Delia—was her heart touched? That was a mystery. James Herrick was a lov able man, but he had many attractions for the ambitious mind besides his lovableness. Delia's fancy ran much on Knowle, and she realised the desirable adjuncts that the possession of such a fair estate ensured. Her face was her fortune, and she had set her hopes on rank, riches, and honours, to match it. There were heirlooms at Knowle in the shape of jewels, point-lace, pictures, enamels, marbles, carvings. These things embellished her reveries. She looked onward and upward. If James Herrick, like the majority of younger sons, had been waiting on promotion, Delia would have asserted her right to be admired by him, but he would not have dominated

her imagination and topped her hopes as the chief figure in her visions of the future. Rich or poor, he would have won his pretty Fanny; poor, he might have sighed for Delia, and sighed in vain. But Jem Herrick had not to wait on promotion. He had achieved honours at both Westminster and Oxford, and meant to reap their rewards. There was no name in that division of the county more popular than James Herrick's, and a project was on foot to bring him into Parliament as one of its representatives at the next general election. All these advantages Delia was able to appreciate, and she was able to appreciate the young gentleman himself as a worthy suitor. Love is blind, they say, but if she had loved with her heart, she must have seen that she had no hold on him, that she even tired him sometimes. But what she wished, she grew in the belief of. She put high lights

into her pictures. She carried Jem triumphantly into the House of Commons, let him attain to swift distinction there, let him rise to fame, place, power. Then she elevated him to the peerage, created him Earl of Knowle, Marquis of Auldcaster.

Do you laugh? Many men and women have indulged in dreams just as baseless, just as foolish.

"Lady Knowle, Marchioness of Auldcaster," Delia whispered, trying the sound of her titles *in nubibus*.

She paced the bare boards of her chamber, heard the trail of velvet robes behind her, felt the weight of a coronet on her straight brow. She meant to be great to do good, like the virtuous woman in Scripture, and the husband of the virtuous woman was known in the gates. Her magnificent hallucinations kept her in serene blind humour. All the world was to

do her homage—its thank-offering for noble service.

When her fall came, it was a great fall, indeed.

On a certain afternoon Cricket had got his sister to himself in the recessed window. She was at her needle-work and her dreaming, and he had a book. The judge was accustomed to say that Cricket would make a fine scholar if he lived; and between his lessons and play-books and his sister's silent presence he was ever supremely contented. Their mother was out of sight, but within hearing, and grandmamma's spectacles contemplated the pair fondly, and often in the intervals of changing her knitting-pins. By-and-by voices were heard in the garden, and one of the voices was Jem Herrick's. Delia craned her neck to see. The rector was with him, and Fanny walking by her father's side. They

turned twice or thrice on the long walk, and Delia began to fold her work. Cricket watched her until he was sure what her movements signified, and then he asked with pettish sarcasm why she must go.

"When Cousin Fan is there, Jem Herrick has all he wants," muttered he.

Delia glanced at her little brother, smiling, and rallying his presumption: "How do you know that?" she whispered. "Read your Latin, Cricket, you will be a wise man some fine day." And with that she opened a leaf of the lattice, and cried to the three in the garden: "I am coming. Wait for me."

They all looked up, and stood where her call arrested them. Fanny blushed, and Jem's eyes sought hers behind her father's back with a gaze of tender urgency. The rector left them, and walked towards the house to meet his niece. On an impulse of the moment her

mother intercepted and delayed Delia, and the lover had a minute to dispose of which he did not waste.

"Fan, let me speak to your father," said he gravely. "I don't think we shall take him by surprise."

"No, Jem, please, no!" cooed she; for at the thought of that serious measure her heart throbbed, her blush faded to white rose, and her soft eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, Fan, please, yes," rejoined Jem, laughing at her, holding her by the chin with kindest contemplation.

She put up her hand on his arm, but was too timorous to prolong the pleading scene. She heard Delia's approach, and fled from it. How could she face her cousin with swimming eyes? Jem Herrick turned to meet her with boldness, not entirely free from confusion. Delia was looking radiantly handsome, and

bore herself with a proud, conscious grace. She was talking to the rector in her high, decided tone as she advanced, and she glanced about in search of Fanny, but made no remark on her evasion. It seemed natural, and no less natural that after a few minutes the rector also should move off, and she should be left with Jem Herrick alone. And Jem was equal to the occasion, which, indeed, demanded but little. Delia had no fearful expectation of being taken by the chin, rifled of kisses, or girdled unawares by a strong arm—tyrannies of her lover which Fanny's sweet, mild persuasiveness had not, of late, been always able to avert. Delia was as safe as her grandmother armed with her knitting-pins, and offered to Jem Herrick's fancy no more temptation.

Fanny had carried her tremors and emotions to her mother's bosom: "Oh, mamma, Jem

Herrick wishes to speak to papa!" sobbed she on her knees. "What shall I do?"

"Leave it to us, my love," said her mother, stroking her hair. Then as Fanny went on sobbing, she added comfortingly: "Jem is in his right. Some day you will run to him as confidently as you run to me." Fanny looked up with wonder and reflection in her face: "But, indeed, my love, I think you do it already."

Fanny found no more to sob and cry for. It was true that she had come with gradual self-consciousness to regard Jem Herrick as a pillar of strength, a refuge in difficulty and distress. A lovely rosy smile broke like sunlight through the capricious shower of her tears, and clasping her hands, she made her confession: "Mamma dear, I am very happy."

"God bless you for a good child, Fan! You deserve to be happy."

Meanwhile the mother of Delia watched at

the window in troubled perplexity. James Herrick paced beside her daughter with what patience he might, whilst sadly eager for his dismissal. Several times they stood still, Delia in high animation, and Jem rather perverse and cavalier, as the observer interpreted his manner. They were interrupted by the judge, and a few minutes after Jem made his escape.

That evening Delia was asked how she would like a journey to London—London was yet in the swing of the season. The proposal came without preface or warning, and it came from her grandfather. Delia's first impulse was joyfully to accept it. She had never been in London. At that date young ladies of the minor gentry were not expected to go to court and shine in London society. But on second thoughts she hesitated. Grandmamma peremptorily obliterated her hesitation.

"You must go, Delia. The chance may not recur. Thank your grandpapa for his kindness," said she.

Delia was instantly obedient, and thanked him quite charmingly. Her mother gave her some excellent advice when they were alone, and seemed not a little depressed at the prospect of parting with her. Delia, on the contrary, was gay, and full of joyous anticipations. In the interim she was busy with her wardrobe, a rather scanty wardrobe, but she was to have leave to visit a milliner in town. She talked openly of Jem Herrick, and wished she could have bidden him come to London too. She wanted him to be let know what a great event was happening to her, and finding Lady Herrick at the rectory when she ran in there to solicit Fanny's help, she invited her to tell him. Jem's mother kissed the girl with unusual warmth and tenderness. But she did

not deliver the message. And James Herrick did not appear again at the House with Golden Gables until after Miss Delia's departure.

CHAPTER III.

A HARD REBOUND.

"Within her breast, as in a palace, lie
Wakeful ambition leagued with hasty pride."

FLETCHER.

JUDGE DAVENTRY'S son had worked hard in his vocation, but he was on the wrong side in politics; and though he had achieved professional distinction, he had not achieved promotion yet. His family was expensive, and he called himself a poor man. A man is easily poor who has a large family of sons to educate and put out in the world. For this reason he had never made himself a home independent of his father's house. He was compelled to be much in town, but his wife seldom followed

him. She stayed down in the country with her children, and when their father came to Auldcaster it was a holiday. He had talked sometimes of a house in London, but it had never been set up, and when the judge brought Miss Delia to town for a month, to give her a taste of its pleasures, they went into lodgings in the lawyers' region of Bedford Square—the same lodgings to which he had brought his wife and daughter-in-law on previous occasions, when events were transacting which few people can hope to assist at more than once or twice in a lifetime.

Delia imagined her grandfather to have business on hand, but his sole business was to provide her with agreeable distractions for a while. He carried her to the play and the opera, to Westminster Abbey and all the public shows for which she had a curiosity or

an inclination. Ladies of his own and her father's acquaintance took her under their wing to balls that were crushes and crowds, to drive in the Park at fashionable hours, and otherwise exerted themselves to make her visit a success. She got attention for her father's and grandfather's sake, and admiration for her own, though she was not of the most popular order of beauty. She appeared to greater advantage in classic repose than in lively motion, and was more attractive to men of the world who had had enough of its noise than to her youthful contemporaries who still delighted to dance and sing.

A letter from her mother brought to Delia the intelligence of her Cousin Fanny's engagement to Mr. James Herrick. The writer diplomatically assumed that the event which was gratifying to the family generally

must be gratifying to her daughter; and Delia, startled into the refuge of imitation, seized upon that cue, and acted appropriately.

"Here is wonderful news, grandpapa! Cousin Fan is going to be married, and to whom do you think? To Jem Herrick of Knowle! That is famous promotion for Fan!" cried she, holding out the letter.

"I have expected it for some time," said the judge pleasantly.

Delia's hand shook, and there was a fluctuating colour in her face, but she carried off the surprise with admirable stoicism. Her grandfather adjusted his glasses to read the letter, and when he brought its perusal to an end Delia was quietly drinking her tea. She did not speak again, which, considering the joyful nature of the tidings, would have struck the judge as strange had he not possessed an

insight of the truth. He was touched by her instinctive moderation and control.

When breakfast was done he got up, and saying mildly: "You will write to Fan. Give her my love and warm congratulations," went out, committing his grand-daughter to the counsels of silence and her own strong common sense.

Delia sat for a long while without moving. She read the letter again. The event was so totally unexpected that she was more benumbed by the shock than hurt by the blow. Her countenance was blank, and she felt nothing consciously, unless it were relief that she was spared all softnesses, and a resolution to betray none. Her mother had done wisely to indicate self-suppression. It was a disappointment not to be spoken of.

An hour elapsed before Delia could attempt to write that letter which her grandfather had

reminded her ought to be written. It was not an easy task. She had the habit of condescending to Fanny as a trivial little soul who could not live without petting, and had often summed up in tones of kindly patronage those modest charms to which James Herrick had surrendered—"A small nose piquant, a cherry mouth, a pair of laughing eyes blue-grey, two blush cheeks, *item*, one dimpled——"

And this simple, happy face had won the triumph that she would not have disdained. It was a lesson for her—one of those lessons of experience which bite into the memory, never to be effaced. And it was a sign of the generosity that leavened her character when she, at once, began to see Fanny through James Herrick's spectacles, and to think the more of her because he, whom all approved, had given the crowning proof of manly worship in seeking her for his wife. She re-considered Fan,

and took her at a truer measure, learning the rule of proportion for their sex—that the most womanly sweet woman is ever the best and the strongest.

The letter when written was well enough. Fanny's eyes glistened at it. Fanny's mother said: "Your cousin Delia has a noble disposition."

At the House with Golden Gables they began to wish now that Delia's mother had gone with her to London. It was likely that Delia wanted her, though she said nothing. The judge perceived no difference in his grand-daughter, unless it were that she laughed more, and fell into sudden fits of absence between gushes of volubility. He was very good to her, and found her abundant amusement and occupation.

Delia endeavoured to keep her painful sensations all to herself. Four-and-twenty

hours sufficed to recover her from the shock she had sustained, and to probe the wound she had got. It was not mortal, not more than she could hide, if she were let alone. And she had great recuperative power. Her face burned now and again, but she was able to believe that she had no reason to be ashamed.

Her thoughts were active, her feelings complex and shifting. Soon her fancy, impatient of a vacuum, began to disport itself round a new object. This new object was, of course, a possible lover—a man she had met several times without seeing him, but who had seen and marked her with critical approval. He was of the same county as the Herricks and Daventrys—Mr. Denys of Cote.

This gentleman was in great request at the house where Delia had first met him. The mother of the family spoke of him as being

very rich, and when one of the daughters objected that he was very ugly, she was told that after people were married that soon wore off, and nothing was of less consequence. Delia did not think Mr. Denys so very ugly. She had never heard his name in the country, but, in the town, he was for that season a rather conspicuous figure in the crowd — a man interesting to lawyers as the winner of the famous suit for the possession of Navestock, and interesting to ladies as a bachelor of great estate, arrived at the age when a man must make haste to marry if he mean to marry well.

That Mr. Denys meant to marry was confidently asserted, but it was said that he would be hard to please. Delia's new face caught him. It was discreetly whispered that she had made a conquest. Her ears were quick. She knew about Navestock. It made

a figure in the county history, and had legends belonging to it.

The judge had never met Mr. Denys until they fell in together at the house of a common acquaintance in London, but he knew him by reputation, and was not of a mind to know more of him. It was therefore a disagreeable surprise when Mr. Denys called upon him at his lodgings, and in his absence inquired for Miss Daventry. Delia saw him. He outstayed the limits of a morning visit on the pretence of a neighbourly desire to be better acquainted with her grandfather (he had a more particular design in it than that), and they made such progress in general conversation that when they met again in the evening Mr. Denys put himself forward with airs of friendly assurance. The judge signified his astonishment and disapprobation in a manner that gave Mr. Denys pause; and as they were

driving back to their lodgings he took Delia to task for her facility.

If there had been light enough to show it, Delia's face would have apprized her grandfather of the need for caution. She reddened with anger, but as she did not speak he believed that his admonition was being taken in good part. He went on to tell her that there had never been any league or alliance between Cote and the House with Golden Gables, and that if Mr. Denys ventured to presume again, as he had presumed that day, she must repel him, which, said the judge, no young lady was better qualified to do.

Delia's high spirit rebelled against this direction. Her pride had not been dumb since her ordeal began, and the prospect of a deliverance unhoped for—of a deliverance with signal triumph — had the effect of

spurring her ambition to new ardours. It was known at home that James Herrick had slighted her; she thought that she did not care for him any longer, but the remembrance that she had cared for him was very irksome, and Mr. Denys' approval was a balm that went to relieve it.

A natural, modest hue of dignified reserve appeared in her when they met next after her grandfather's lecture. The judge received Mr. Denys' civilities with a freezing coldness, and withdrew the young lady from his attention. Mr. Denys was piqued. But Delia seemed to cast a wavering, unwilling glance behind her in her retreat, and Mr. Denys was encouraged.

Henceforward there was a covert sense of attraction between the two. Mr. Denys knew what he wanted, and that his opportunity was now or never. Miss Daventry was manifestly

gratified when he distinguished her above others. He sent her a letter, and she kept it secret. He took his answer from her eyes the same evening. He wrote the next day with more boldness. Delia, in a commotion of feeling, vouchsafed him a reply that was gracious, and her fancy crystallised into an imperious resolve that no law should stand between her and this chance of advancement. He addressed her again, and now in the rapturous accents of a lover, sending her a gift of jewels that seemed to her royal. Delia blushed for shame at the secrecy of the transaction, but her easy wooing had already run its length, and when she accepted the offering of Mr. Denys she accepted him with it, requiring only that he would stay for her departure from London before seeking her father's consent to their marriage. Secure of her own, a week's patience was not a very cruel im-

position, but the lover railed at it, and Delia was flattered with a revived sense of predominance.

In the course of that week many private communications were exchanged between them, but in public they made no sign, and when the judge carried his grand-daughter back to Auldcaster his kind heart yearned over her with the fondest affection. He had a sincere anxiety about the meeting with her cousin Fan and Jem Herrick. He need have had none. Delia was satisfied with the reparation that had been made her, and received the lovers with a superb magnanimity. Her grandfather commended her for a good girl, and was intensely relieved to have that over. But her mother was uncomfortably perplexed, discerning symptoms of gratified pride in her daughter's tone and mien, for which, as there was no reason that appeared, there

must be a reason that was concealed. And her mother did not like Delia's concealments.

Cricket, that keen-eyed, suspicious changeling, went straight to the root of the matter, and asked if she had found a lord for a lover up in London.

"No, Cricket, no *lord*," said his sister with an intonation which, while denying the lord, admitted the lover.

"A very rich man, then?"

Delia nodded, and laid her forefinger on her lip.

Cricket acquiesced in the plea for silence, but naturally wanted to know more. "Does he live far off?"

"In this county. That is all I shall tell you now — and remember, it is only between us two."

Cricket looked up at his sister with a pierc-

ing scrutiny: "Then you are not overjoyed? You are afraid?"

Delia compressed her mouth with a petulant gesture, and walked away.

Cricket threw another biting word after her—"You are not proud of him? You know they will be vexed?"

Delia's conscience had given judgment against her. She was well aware that her grandfather did not condemn men, as he had condemned Mr. Denys, lightly or for nothing. She *was* afraid. She trembled in anticipation of the day of account. And yet she knew she should stand fast in the end to what she had undertaken. She got down the old county history, and strengthened herself with a perusal of the glories of Navestock, and a study of the woodcuts in queer perspective that illustrated them. When she shut it up again, she

was able to look beyond the bad quarter of an hour that had to be passed, and to contemplate the scenery of her life in the distance with a pale composure and courage.

CHAPTER IV.

DISCLOSURE.

"She was ruddy through the perfection of her beauty: but her heart was in anguish for fear."

"ESTHER."—*The Apocrypha.*

MISS DELIA'S humour did not continue long in one stay. Self-doubt and discontent crept in. On the second evening after her return from London, secluded in her white chamber, she brought out her fine jewels from their hiding-place, and sat by the window with them in her lap, absently bathing her hands in the pliant, linked brilliance of necklace and bracelet and band, and looking through tears at two figures in the garden.

They were James Herrick and her cousin Fan.

What Delia felt for their blithe condition she did not analyse. It was exquisite pain. There was the subtle, cruel bewitchment of envy in it. She tried not to think of them, but of her own triumph, soon to be disclosed. It was vain. Across her visionary pageant came again and again and again the shadows of that blissful pair, felicitated by all the world, with father and mother and friends doing them honour and pleasure every hour, and happiest still when they might stray off into some green solitude, and see love alone in one another's eyes.

If she had risen and beheld herself in the glass, a stern face would have looked out at her with a melancholy frown. But her beauty did not retain the darkling mask. And if hard thoughts pestered her imagination, she was the more careful to keep her heart from evil, and to set a watch upon her lips.

Some of them could not but see the traces of her conflict, and the deep sympathy of silence screened it. Her mother was sorry and pitiful beyond measure. She rose and listened at her door in the night, but there was never any cry for help. Once she asked to stay in her daughter's room, but Delia's reserve was invincible.

"What for? I am well, mamma," she said sweetly.

"Are you well, Delia? Is there nothing you want to tell me?" she whispered, pressing her close.

Delia looked in her mother's eyes, and kissed her soft quivering mouth, but shut her out.

Her mother thought that Delia blamed her, perhaps. But it was not so. Delia had not that way of casting her own fault upon others.

"There is more on her mind than we know," said her grandmother.

Her mother answered: "I am sure there is. She is not only very unhappy, but she is very anxious. There is a secret to come out —some doubtful matter. It was not wise to send her away as we did."

"It was an experiment. We thought it wise."

Thus they talked. The judge heard them, but did not speak. He remembered Mr. Denys of Cote, but still he did not speak. He was observant, and perceived soon that Delia was wary and suspicious of him. It must be a secret, indeed, that could make her act towards her grandfather as towards an enemy.

"Pride never was a good counsellor, Delia," he said to her one evening with a wistful kindness, to draw her back to him.

Delia felt conscious, and sighed. "Don't

believe worse of me, gran'papa, than you must," was her reply.

It was not a confession, but it admitted that there was need of confession. She was waiting expectantly, and very uneasily now until the disclosure was made.

They were walking in the garden in the twilight, and others were walking there too. It was one of the *last times* of her life.

The post letters were laid every morning at the judge's end of the breakfast table, and he distributed them. A little over a week after their arrival at home he handed Delia a letter, at the same time looking at her long and penetratingly. A torrent of blushes dyed her face, and her eyes fell. The letter was one about which there was no pretence of hiding the matter. Mr. Denys had sealed it with his own seal. Delia laid it down seal upwards, and scorned to reverse it when Cricket espied

the crest, and instantly referred it to the owner.

There was no more talk after he had spoken, but just as they began to move from the table a noise was heard in the hall, and Delia's mother glancing at her, said: "It is your father."

The young lady kept her place, her unopened letter in her hand. All the others turned towards the door to greet the newcomer. There was a second door leading to the servants' quarters and the back-stairs. Delia bethought herself of that way of escape, and when her father came in she had disappeared: she was secure in her room, tearing open, reading her letter, to get what light and preparation from it she could for the impending scene. Her heart throbbed, her colour came and went, all her limbs shook, but her pride swelled high.

Mr. Denys wrote that her father had given his proposal a short hearing and a curt dismissal. With many lover-like expressions he added, that he depended upon her to keep her word, and said that he should come to Auldcaster to see her, whether her family gave him leave or refused it. Delia felt that she should see him thankfully—and confirm her promise when he came.

She was in some awe of her father. His long absence made him less familiar to his children than the judge was. Cricket called to her presently: "Sister, are you not coming to kiss papa?" and she made ready to brave them all.

That was a sad day at the House with Golden Gables. Delia was pale and rigid, and fierce too, as she went slowly down the grand staircase. Her mother looked out of the judge's study, and said: "We are here, my

love;" and as she went in, and was folded in a warm embrace, she was surprised to find herself lapsing into tears.

The judge sat in his elbow-chair, leaning back and wearing that austere countenance which had made him awful on many a day to conscious criminals. He was awful to Delia now—a man so upright, yet so tender and good, that the most hardened sinner might well shrink from his merited rebuke. And she had deceived him, had played a double part — meanly double, immodest too. Her pride could not blind her to that meanness, that immodesty. The judge's opinion of her behaviour, visible though not spoken, covered her with shame and confusion.

Her father kept her for a minute within his arms, surveying her with a mild sarcasm which issued in the query : "Why so warlike, Delia? We are not enemies here."

Until now, Delia had been simply his beauty. He had formed great expectations of her. It had sometimes occurred to him that she might have been more charming for a strain of fun, a spark of wit, because he loved a bright woman. He had even once told her mother that they were spoiling her in the country, letting her be too idle. And here was the result.

He gave her a chair and seated himself, and Delia found her mother and grandmother both confronting her. She met their grieved eyes with a clouded, stubborn look which augured ill for them all. Unintentionally, perhaps unconsciously, she had brought Mr. Denys' letter crushed in her hand, and an instant call upon her obedience was made by her father, saying, "Give me that letter, Delia." She started, hesitated, but gave it. It was the shortest way of making known her determination.

Had Mr. Denys been a poor young gentleman, handsome and high-spirited, whose suit was resisted by her family for low, prudential reasons, his letter would have seemed a very fine letter, indeed; but to Mr. Daventry, who knew him for what he was, it read like a hollow, rhetorical effusion. There could be no mistaking the derision and contempt with which he glanced through it, and restored it to his daughter.

"Your grandfather played the duenna very badly, my dear, to let such a gallant, gay Lothario as Mr. Denys of Cote get possession of your virgin affections, and with such despatch too," he said causticly. "Can you tell us how it happened?"

Delia held up her head, blushing intensely, but kept her eyes down, and answered not a word.

"Poor child, she does not know him,"

said her mother, in the voice of a moderator.

"She soon can know him. Denys of Cote is not a man gentlemen care to have in their company," the judge said.

The fashion of locking daughters up was gone by. Her grandfather said, let there be no harshness, no precipitation. Delia had used a cunning against himself capable of defeating any guard that might be placed on her. Let her hear now what the world at large had to say of her lover: if that did not sink in and work a cure, her case was hopeless. The sacred name of love was not taken on anybody's lips. No one believed that love could be concerned in Delia's infatuation.

She was not required to give any promises. There had been an intention of appealing to her sense of honour and duty, but that had

passed out of mind before her coldly obstinate aspect.

The scene was not prolonged. Her father signified that she might go. Her mother put out a hand to touch her as she passed. Delia never looked up, offered no excuse, pleaded nothing in extenuation of her fault. She took her dismissal passively, and went away wondering whether she, poor soul, was alone to blame. She shed some tears in pity for herself. Then presently came her mother in the hope to comfort and persuade. But for that time it was of no avail. Delia would say nothing, would answer nothing. She felt weak and vulnerable, and sought refuge in silence.

CHAPTER V.

MR. DENYS OF COTE.

"Some men, like pictures, are fitter for a corner than a full light."
SENECA.

THE House with Golden Gables was not like itself after the disclosure of Miss Delia's secret and hasty engagement. Nobody knew what sunshine she had made there until this cloud fell upon her, nor did she know how much she had lived by love until she had to endure coldness and averted looks.

Mr. Denys came to Auldcaster as he had promised, and saw Delia in the presence of the judge and her mother. She put herself into his hands, and Mr. Denys claimed to

hold her bound. The judge said that her marriage with him should never have his consent. It was Delia herself who rejoined, that she should be of age within the year, and free to marry without it.

This rejoinder was the key-note of her subsequent behaviour. After Mr. Denys' visit she was open with her mother. She told her everything. Everything was not so very much. Her mother coloured when she was shown the jewels, and said, *that* was a pity; but besides *that* there was nothing any of them need have taken exception to had the lover himself been unexceptionable. Her grandfather had conceived a high indignation against Delia; but even he allowed, that had she played off her deceits for the sake of some ardent young fellow of her own age, he would have known how to forgive her. It was skittish, sly tricks on behalf of

Mr. Denys of Cote that were beyond his excusing.

Save the judge, they all privately referred the disaster to Delia's disappointment about James Herrick. The judge would not hear it. He said, Jem was not to blame: Jem had never touched her heart. He said that nothing was to blame but her indulged pride, which had shot up into a mad rivalry, and was hurrying her towards endless repentances for the sake of an imagined triumph. She had set her mind on being a great lady and very rich. She believed that riches would buy many things that are not, in fact, to be purchased with money; and to get them, she was ready to run into a marriage which every one who loved her agreed in regarding as a consummate degradation.

Delia was easier within herself when all was told, but the tax on her fortitude was

very heavy. The assumption that she did not care for Mr. Denys was general and obtrusive.

"Luxury and show you may get by your sacrifice, but none of the joys that content the heart," her mother pleaded with her.

It did not appear that Delia coveted those joys. "I am not like Cousin Fan. The foolish fondnesses that fill up the measure of her happiness would be troublesome to me."

"You don't know what you say, Delia. Some day your heart will ache for the simple affection you make so light of now."

Delia sighed. Did she make light of simple affection? She thought not. Her mouth was set, but not in scorn. Her grandmother, who came of a stricter and sterner generation, did not mince her speech in delicate remonstrance. "What most shocks me is your bad taste,"

cried she, her fine old face wrinkled with anger and disgust. "Mr. Denys may have the air of a gentleman, but he is such an ugly fellow. He comes of a bad lot, and is saddled with a bad inheritance. A curse goes with Navestock. You may laugh, Delia, but never a man who has had it has kept a son to take his seat!"

Delia said that she knew of the curse, but she was not superstitious. The old lady flushed at her manner, and bade her not be disrespectful. Then Delia flushed, assuming the air and tone of a woman of consequence, with a right to her own opinion.

Cricket was very miserable in these days. He got up in haste much curious information about the successive owners of Navestock, which, with the odd spite of a jealousy that is not inconsistent with affection, he retailed to his sister in the intention of vexing her as

thoroughly as she was vexing everybody else.

Delia kept her temper, and retorted that a man was not to be held responsible for the bad deeds of his ancestors.

"He is not hanged for them, perhaps," Cricket admitted, with a pensive air of considering whether it might not be safer for society if he were.

"You are unkind, Cricket, and very prejudiced and silly."

"I state historical facts, sister. And the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation."

"The third and fourth generation are dead and gone. Mr. Denys is ever so far removed from your heroes of the elder branch."

"The curse goes with Navestock—the love of money and the death of children."

"Cricket, you are cruel, cruel!"

"If you do not believe me you can read it in the old county history—and how Navestock was got by Giles Denys of Cote in the time of Old Noll. It is a very black old story, indeed. I would not have it in our annals for all the world."

Delia knew the black old story, but was incredulous of its consequences. She expressed her incredulity quite coolly, and said, that if the misdeeds of his fathers were the worst that could be brought up against Mr. Denys she did not care.

"I am not saying that they are the worst. He has a reputation of his own, and there is time enough for the family likeness to come out very strong in him. It is easy for God to make a poor man rich, and money covers a multitude of sins. The world will have a short memory for his now, but grandpapa

can tell you what there is to be forgotten."

"Don't, Cricket dear. Be you good to me," Delia whispered entreatingly, kneeling by his chair, and laying her face against his face, as her loving way was to soothe him when he suffered.

After that Cricket had mercy on her, understanding, in part, her pain.

Her grandmother was her most persevering adversary. Towards her mother Delia continued always mild and persuasive, but her grandmother encountered in the girl a spirit as intrepid as her own.

First impressions go for much. In the beginning when Mr. Denys was introduced to her, she saw him in company where he was courted, and well liked enough. She had found in him no defect of manliness, and if she had spoken out her motives, so far as she knew

them, she might have said that she was grateful to him. She did say so to her mother a little later, in reply to one of her frequent tender appeals.

"I am very grateful to Mr. Denys. I am sure that he loves me."

"And don't we love you?" her mother rejoined with pathetic reproach in her voice.

There had not been much show of it since Mr. Denys' visit to Auldcaster, and Delia implied a doubt by her silence. The judge was distant and reserved in manner, and did not talk to her or make her his companion as he used to do. The like constraint was visible in her father, and even affected her elder brother. She felt it in every vein of her heart, but it did not relax her resolution. Nor did she resent it. Apart from the cause, it was readily admitted that she bore herself with

sufficient dignity in treating the present difficulty as an evil that might, perhaps, by time and patient steadfastness be overcome.

She had to be very wary of undermining and surprises. Her grandmother recommended to her perusal a neat duodecimo in white and gold (a present to herself in her young ladyhood), containing "Letters on the Improvement of the Mind," by Mrs. Chapone, and "A Father's Legacy to his Daughters," by Dr. Gregory of Edinburgh. Delia found there more besides the precepts of filial obedience which were specially directed to her address by silken strings between the leaves, and being inquired of by-and-by whether she had yet given herself to the study of the book, she was prepared with her answer.

"Yes, gran'ma, I have," she said seriously. "It is a little book full of sound counsel. Some of it is too late, but I have discovered

a few wise and beautiful sentences that might have been written for me. This, for instance: 'As Nature has not given us that unlimited range in our choice which men enjoy, she has therefore assigned to us greater flexibility of taste.'"

The elder lady perceived with chagrin that her moral armoury had furnished weapons to serve against herself.

Delia proceeded: "I take it that England and Scotland are one on this subject, gran'ma? because Dr. Gregory says that in his country, without an unusual share of natural sensibility and very peculiar good fortune, a woman has very little probability of marrying for love. He thinks that what is called love amongst us is rather gratitude, and a partiality to the man who prefers us to the rest of our sex. I am convinced that he is right. It must have been that partiality which invaded me when I

was singled out by Mr. Denys as the young lady who would suit him best; for everybody else calls him so very ugly, and I cannot see it."

Lady Daventry was vastly disconcerted. Delia grew bolder with a sense of triumph: "The old Scotch doctor says further, that if crosses and difficulties are put in the way, this gratitude is likely to rise into a preference which, with suspense, may advance at last to a degree of attachment that is very near to love——"

With great irritation her grandmother broke in: "Delude yourself, Delia, with whatever pleas and pretences you can invent, but the true sum of the matter is that you are willing to marry for money. That was what *she* did" —with a fierce gesture of reprobation towards the glowing portrait of the French Madam. "She sold her beauty to be rich—and in a

year what befell her beauty? You know—and how she lived after: blinded, neglected, the most despised and pitiable of women."

Delia looked white and sick, but made her rejoinder firmly: "Gran'ma, mine will not be a mere mercenary marriage such as hers was. Mr. Denys is in every way a fit match for me if I think so. Had he not been rich he would never have addressed me. And had grandpapa been civil, he was intending to go about his courtship in the old-fashioned way of laying his proposals first before my parents, when they could have raised what objections and asked what explanations they pleased. I am not to blame for all that has passed which you disapprove."

Then Delia retreated, and left her grandmother with something new to reflect upon.

Reflection did not, however, induce Lady Daventry to change her tactics. She believed

herself strong in good reasons for interrupting the engagement, and was ready to do it at all hazards. She returned to the charge again and again. She kept no terms with the girl, and once availed herself of an opportunity against her which Delia could never quite forgive.

Lady Herrick had a married daughter residing in the neighbourhood of Cote, and Lady Daventry inquired of her, as by the way, in Delia's presence, whether Mr. Denys was in better odour there than formerly.

Lady Herrick smiled, and answered crisply: "He has always the same autocratic temper and high sense of his prerogative which brought him into collision with the judge when he was a young man. Sir John still tells the story of that famous cause, and talks of what a good Grecian Daventry was."

"What was that famous cause?" Delia asked with an air of quiet interest.

"It was a small matter involving a great principle which Mr. Denys had despised. It is too long to tell you the particulars, but the judge had to state the law in Mr. Denys' favour, and the pith of the story is, that having done that, he came down upon him with a fine quotation from a speech of Pericles, to this effect: that while hearkening to the constituted authorities and the laws, Mr. Denys appeared to have but a dull perception of those other laws which, though never formally enacted, all men hold it shame to violate."

"Mr. Denys was not in court unfortunately, and he missed it," Lady Daventry said.

Delia blushed and quivered to her fingertips: "It was very severe. And was it quite deserved?" she asked keenly.

"It was thought to be deserved," Lady Herrick answered, struck by the marked intonation of the question. She paused an instant, considering it, and no one else taking up the word, she added: "Mr. Denys has the character of being a hard and mean man, but people are indulgent to his foibles, and have ceased to expect from him better than he knows. He is a great prize in the matrimonial lottery since his accession to Navestock, but the *she* must be quick indeed, who means to make sure of such a slippery, changeable lover."

Lady Daventry looked at her granddaughter with a directness that could not fail to fix Lady Herrick's notice. Delia looked at her again with a pale defiance that said as plainly as if she had spoken, that she was not afraid. The visitor understood that covert feelings were at work here, and to further

inquiries she replied with management. Delia gathered up some of her words.

"Whatever faults Mr. Denys has—and it is not to be denied that he has many and great faults—he is *good* to his own. I have never heard any one say otherwise of him than that he was *good* to his *own*."

Delia brightened, and said that she valued the homely virtues. Then she blushed. Then she laughed outright. This was telling the whole story.

Lady Herrick asked no questions, but said kindly: "You are reasonable, Delia. The homely virtues most affect the happiness of women;" and she kissed the girl.

Lady Herrick was one of those who believed that Delia had loved her son James, and her first thought on this disclosure of her ambitious match was that she had rushed into it to conceal or quell the sting of her dis-

appointment. She wished her well and very well, and was sorry that she had said what she had said. But Delia accepted her kiss cordially, and with it was given to her the heart of a true friend.

CHAPTER VI.

A WRAITH.

"The finding out of trouble is a wearisome labour of the mind."
Ecclesiasticus.

After the conversation with Lady Herrick, Miss Daventry's engagement to Mr. Denys of Cote could not any longer be kept a secret from the intimate friends of the family. It was a wonder and surprise to nearly all. The Daventrys had been very strict in their marriages, and the Denyses had been a race peculiarly unfortunate. Nevertheless, some people said that the young lady had done remarkably well for herself.

The judge declared his own prejudice

invincible, and refused Mr. Denys any access to the society of his grand-daughter at the House with Golden Gables. But he was seen in Auldcaster from time to time, and Delia did not conceal that she met him. More than once she communicated to Cricket passages of their conversation which interested the boy:—

The ancestor from whom Mr. Denys inherited his title to Cote was a half-brother of the unredeemed villain who brought Navestock into the family. His name was Hugh. He had married the daughter and heiress of a man of Kent, and his name and the land he got with her—no great deal of it—had been handed down from father to son without a break to the present day:—

"Acklam, in the parish of Sevenoaks. You shall see it, Cricket," his sister promised. "The eldest son always had a public-

school education, and stuck to the land. The others followed commerce. There have been Denyses aldermen of London—most respectable people."

Cricket went to work to investigate these respectable people, and Delia borrowed for him from Acklam a fine old history of the county of Kent, which told him what pretensions the Kentish Denyses had to rank amongst the county worthies. Their pretensions were small, but they seemed to have had regard to their name; for though not shining with glorious deeds, their record was fair and honourable. Cricket found it somewhat dull. The deeds of these good men were buried with their bones. A half-timbered house no better than a grange, a few fields, and a few old stones in the churchyard, were all that Mr. Denys of Cote was born to, and all he had in prospect until he had done with

school. It was open to any one who desired to believe the best of him to say, that, bred to narrow fortunes, he had learned narrow ways, and had never been able to get out of them.

And why had he not been able to get out of them?

There were circumstances—extenuating or not, as men chose to treat them. Their aspects were various, according to the point of view. As yet Delia knew nothing of these circumstances, but it was necessary that she should be informed, and her grandmother found the occasion on a day when she seemed in better cheer than usual. She had walked a mile on the road to Beauminster to meet Mr. Denys, who was at Navestock on affairs of business, and being asked if she was in good spirits because she had seen her lover, she confessed frankly that so it was.

"I am sorry for you, Delia, building your castles in the air still. You are looking to Mr. Denys to give you a great place in the world—let me tell you, *that* is not in his power. He has never even taken his place amongst his equals. Since his mother's death he has lived in the country, where everything is known, in open defiance of social order."

"What do you mean, gran'ma—in open defiance of social order?" Delia asked. She had become very pale, and shook from head to foot.

"There is only one thing that I can mean. You are not a child—you are old enough to understand. Mr. Denys has made his home for years with a lady who is not his wife, and he has sons, half-grown young men."

Delia was not a child, nor were her feelings any longer childlike. She got up and went out of the room, supporting herself by the

wall as she went, and began to climb the great staircase. The window was open on the landing over the door towards the street, and Mr. Denys' black horse that he had ridden in the morning was being led up and down in front of the White Hart. Mr. Denys himself came out of the inn at that instant, and caught sight of Delia's face at the window. She made him a sign, and stopped there while he crossed to the house.

The judge in his study heard Mr. Denys' foot at the door and his strong peremptory voice saying: "There is a lady here who wishes to speak with me. I will step through into the garden."

Delia came trembling down the stairs again, and went to meet him on the lawn.

"I have something to say to you," were her words, faint as a sigh almost, looking up in his eyes with a death-like solemnity.

What more she said, or how, neither could well remember afterwards, but Mr. Denys understood her to be adjuring him to tell her the truth, if there was anything in his life concealed that it would kill her kindness to discover when no door of repentance or escape was left her.

He answered her emphatically that there was *not*—and listened breathless for what was to come next.

Delia with passionate intensity went on: "Because I should die of shame to supplant in her lifetime a woman who is the mother of your children. She is your wife though you were not married in church."

"I wish I had told you the story myself. She is dead, Delia: I lost her three years ago. You call her my wife, and so she was. She was a good and loving woman. Some day I will talk to you about her——"

Mr. Denys was as powerfully stirred as Delia herself. Her eyes filled. She was sorry if she had hurt him. He saw it, and was quick to reassure her.

"For what you have said, I honour you the more. It is not your fault that you were misled. But you must believe me when I tell you that the lady you have heard of was everything to me that a true wife could be. She never had a rival while she lived. Even you can be no more than second to her——"

There was little need to say that. While he was speaking Delia felt by the vibration of his voice that Mr. Denys did not care for her as he had cared for his love whom he had loved when he was young. The interview thrilled them both with pain, but they parted friends. And the next day Mr. Denys wrote to her. There are two ways of telling most stories. He chose the right way—the shortest and

plainest. There was something for Delia to read between the lines. She read it fairly, and was bereaved in the process of many fine, delusive fancies. But her mind was fixed. She had lost her ideal of a perfect life, and of this real life that was substituted for it she was purposed to make the best. She showed Mr. Denys that she trusted him, and in due time he gave his proofs that she had not trusted him for nothing.

To her grandmother she said not a word — her grandmother had used her disingenuously —but to her mother she recited all she knew of the lady whom she chose to describe as Mr. Denys' wife, not married in church. Her mother listened with a red flush on her cheek, which confessed to a sense of humiliating, patient pain.

"Don't speak till I have done, mamma. I will use Mr. Denys' own words. He insists

upon it that their marriage was good, because they broke no law of God, and they were faithful each to the other until death parted them. She was a Greek by birth. They were very young and much thrown together, and they had a passionate attachment. His mother was urgent with him to make a different connection because of Cote looming in sight, and the young lady was sent out of his way. He sought her, and she found him. If either sinned, both sinned—he says the sacrament of marriage lies not in rites but in consent. When he came to his kingdom and came home again, they had two sons. Any day he would have gone to church with her, but she would not. She was warned of the curse of Navestock, which already he was contending for, and she said, 'Let me keep my children;' and when he reasoned with her she still refused, on the plea that she loved her first-

born best, and no younger son should come before him in any right they had. And in this she persevered. They paid their penalty, of course, and perhaps her share of it was not the heaviest. She had her children, and she had him, all she cared for most, and she had her house and garden, and friends of her own people. She was a sweet and happy-tempered woman of great energy and cultivated talents —a companion with whom he would have been contented to grow old. Yes, mamma, he has told me so. All this is true. Mistress Pride has had a great fall. Nothing, I think, will ever set her up again."

The tears were running down her mother's face when Delia ceased. It was her voice set them flowing, the emotion of it, strongly controlled.

"And now, mamma, I think I ought to be let alone, and to suffer no more persecution on

account of Mr. Denys. Say it shall be so," she entreated.

"For myself I promise, Delia. I cannot undertake for the rest," her mother said. "It is cruelly mortifying to us all—but if this man has elicited your sympathy, I know that to try to turn you is vain."

"I shall never be turned, mamma. If that is the best you can say, let us make an end of talking about it."

CHAPTER VII.

A ROUGH WOOING.

"Reputation oft got without merit, and lost without deserving."
SHAKSPEARE.

THIS serious remonstrance of Delia addressed to her mother did not fail entirely of its desired effect. She had another advocate near home in the rector, who called the judge's resentment exaggerated, and advised more lenient treatment for the young lady. The judge maintained his right to exclude Mr. Denys from his house, and to withhold his consent to his grand-daughter's engagement; but, by degrees, Delia was permitted to see that though her marriage with Mr. Denys might not have the

cordial acquiescence of any of her family, yet it was not a marriage that would justify them in cutting her off from their kindness; and her mother, at length, told her that though she must not expect a wedding such as was preparing for her cousin Fan, neither need she fear being sent away from home like a daughter who had offended. Delia's pride and hopes of glory were now so far subdued that this concession satisfied her.

Before that wedding was celebrated it became news for the whole county that Mr. Denys of Cote was a suitor for the hand of the beautiful grand-daughter of Judge Daventry, and that it was sure to be a match; for though her family disliked the connection, the young lady herself was not discouraging. The newsmongers of Auldcaster pondered whether, in these conflicting circumstances, Mr. Denys would be present amongst the guests at the

marriage of Mr. James Herrick and the rector's eldest daughter. The propriety of inviting him was debated in a family council, but firmly negatived by the judge, on the plea that twice before there had been a slip between the cup and the lip of a lady Mr. Denys had made conspicuous by his notice, and that the same thing might happen again. Her grandmother, who spared Delia no pain that she thought it salutary to inflict, told her of the council and its conclusion.

Delia with a curl of her delicate lip said quietly: "Mr. Denys has no wish to go where he is not welcome. About those ladies whom grandpapa says he made conspicuous by his notice, I should have expected grandpapa to inquire before speaking. There may have been ladies willing to deliver Mr. Denys from social ostracism, but I am quite sure he never asked them."

The marriage from the rectory took place on a morning in October, a fine hunting morning with a southerly wind and a cloudy sky, when, if Mr. James Herrick had not been going to be married, he would certainly have been out with the hunt. The hounds were to throw off at eleven o'clock at Holmwood, about a mile to the north of the town, and it happened that just as the bride's procession was starting to cross the road from the garden-door to the church that several gentlemen came at full trot up Rood Hill on their way to the meet.

"Denys of Cote and his two sons," Sir John Herrick whispered to the bride's mother as the three rode by, the last of the cavalcade.

The boys were attracted by the vision of beauty, and wheeled about to see. Their father pulled up a little farther on, and Delia

amongst the bridesmaids looking that way gave him a surprised bright sign of recognition, then a little wave of the hand, most graceful, which he acknowledged with a sweeping bow. The boys copied their father, and when the fair ladies had vanished into the gloom of the church they galloped forward, the clattering of their horses' hoofs on the paved road ringing and echoing from a long way off.

Delia had a soft blush on her cheek and a wavering smile on her mouth all through the ceremony. She was composedly happy to the end of the day, and to her mother her demeanour was especially gratifying. She had not witnessed the episode at going into church, nor had it been reported to her yet; but they all heard of it later, and her grandmother expressed great disgust.

Sir John Herrick, who had seen it, said to

his wife afterwards : " There are worse fellows than Denys of Cote. Never tell me again that Miss Delia does not care for him."

"She cares for him quite enough. I am very glad of it," said Lady Herrick.

The newly-married pair went upon the Continent for a few weeks, and were welcomed home to Knowle shortly before Christmas. The season was kept up with great festivity on their behalf all round the neighbourhood. Mr. Denys of Cote was not of that society, but by a little effort he might have been included in it. Nobody, however, chose to make the effort. Miss Daventry went everywhere, and was much observed, much admired. Probably she was envied now and again. But she had a difficult part to play. That her engagement was still without the consent of her family was evident, because Mr. Denys was never to be seen at any of their houses.

People speculated how he liked it, and why he put up with it. He did not like it at all, but he was a man who could reserve his feelings, and he put up with it for his love's sake. Delia had endeared herself to him in a way and degree that she did not yet know of. He was perfectly thoughtful and considerate for her. It was her sweet look of goodness that had charmed him, and this goodness rang true. When he saw her grieve, he was sorely tempted to try a rescue, but she had it so much at heart to leave all friends at home that he dared not vex her with a word.

How keenly Delia felt the position of Mr. Denys she betrayed by a request that she preferred at this time to her cousin Fan. Fanny made much of Delia, and invited her to Knowle amongst the earliest of the guests who came to stay.

"I want you to do me a kindness, Fan—ask Mr. Denys to dine at Knowle while I am here. James knows him," she said, blushing warmly in her earnestness to have what she asked granted.

Fanny was struck with consternation. "James knows him in a manner, but he cannot bear him. I should not like to propose having him here. Oh, poor Delia! Why did you despair of yourself so soon? If you could have had patience, somebody as good as James would have wanted you before long. None of us can ever feel friends with Mr. Denys of Cote." Fanny's pleading was certainly not judicious.

Hot tears rushed to Delia's eyes: "You are all determined that he shall be the only friend I have," she said with passionate force. "I am sorry that I mentioned it—but I

will never ask you to do me a favour again!"

Fanny mingled her tears with Delia's, but Mr. Denys was not invited to dine at Knowle.

The remaining months that intervened before Delia came of age lingered along under clouds of alienation and discomfort. There was for her none of the sweet spring courting-time, such as makes beautiful most young lives with a green pleasant place for memory to go back and rest upon in dull and arid after-weather. Mr. Denys never saw her under a roof all this long while, and saw her but seldom anywhere. But their correspondence was unremitting, and it became clear as the summer advanced that she had an understanding with him to end her ordeal at home with her first day of liberty. Her father

had remained neutral, hoping, and perhaps expecting, a silent change; but when her mother convinced him that the thing was inevitable, he agreed that it had better be done decently and in order, and she was bidden to bring her to London to buy new clothes.

Delia was glad to go to London, but she told her mother that she should want no wedding-dress. "Only a travelling-dress, mamma. Mr. Denys will not enter this house. He will take me away straight from the church-door." She spoke in a low, strained voice, smiling with tremulous lips, and looking full in her mother's face.

"Oh, my love, how sad it is! What a pity that you should leave us so. It is fit to break my heart!"

Delia's eyes began to shine. "It shall be a white dress, mother, because I am young,

you know. And though we are not to have a show, people will come to see me married."

When the judge was informed of the arrangements for the marriage, he was relieved, and Delia's grandmother said austerely that so it would be best: it would be inconsistent to affect rejoicings for an event that they deplored.

Then to Delia she said in her cutting tone: "Had I been in your shoes, my dear, I would have made it easier for everybody by playing the heroine, and running away with Mr. Denys."

"I would—only then it would have made it harder for me ever to come home again," was Delia's rejoinder in a half-whisper to herself.

The judge heard it, and was struck by signs of mental suffering in her that had

crept on so gradually as to have escaped them all. Their eyes met, and hers were full. Such weakness in Delia was strange to him.

"I am weary with crying," she said, wiping her tears, "and I wish it were over. You have not been very kind to me, gran'ma, but I don't want to say anything that it may hurt you to remember when I am gone."

The judge was touched and perplexed. Could it be that her affections, hunted away from home, had found a refuge and rest in this man whom they all contemned — but who had the character of being *good* to his *own?*

Another inconsistency offered itself for solution.

Lady Herrick had said that Mr. Denys bore the reputation of a very mean man; yet

the best gentleman in the county could not have behaved more generously in the matter of marriage-settlements than Mr. Denys behaved to the poor young lady he had chosen for his wife. And he reposed in her, besides, a trust and confidence which gratified her with a new sense of honour after the contumely she had undergone.

At the last there was regret amongst her friends that they had not made better of it for her dear sake. For they loved her—they all loved her, even her grandmother, who was so angry and so bitter.

It was dreadful to Cricket to watch his sister going about gathering up her small property in old birthday gifts and Christmas books, and to think that to-morrow she would be gone—gone clean out of sight, never to be at his beck and call any more. Her tears fell constantly, and she avoided every face. It

was no use saying now that they had forgiven her, and they would try to hope—to hope that God would bless her, and she might be happy. She could anticipate nothing but the tragedy of her near departure, and all the loss that it involved. There were no busy, lively preparations to divert her thoughts. Mr. Denys had arrived at the White Hart just across the street, and no one wanted him but her.

In the afternoon Grace and Emmeline came from the rectory to see if they could do anything for her. They could not, but they kissed her often, by way of being comfortable. Delia found it very hard to bear—so hard that it wrung a cry from her.

"It is like a bad dream. I never could have believed my life would turn so ill;" and then she quite broke down.

Grace asked presently who was going with

her—on her wedding journey—to wait upon her.

"Phœbe," Delia said, recovering herself with a sad sort of mirth—"droll little Phœbe! Gran'mamma calls her a queer little body to be own woman to a young married lady, but I am very fond of Phœbe. She has been with me ever since Abby was sent away, and I can talk to her about all of you here at home. Cote is her country too; she will be going back to her own people." Delia did not show herself in the drawing-room again after her outburst of natural sorrow. That exhausted her.

"She has shut herself up from us," her mother said, late in the night, when all but the heads of the house had separated.

"Everything is ready for the morning?" the judge asked.

"Yes, everything. We are to be at the church by a quarter to ten."

"Go upstairs last. When we have shut our doors, perhaps, she will call you."

And Delia did call her mother. She was listening for her footstep down the little passage that led to her room.

"I want to talk to you, mamma. I have been waiting—I thought you were never coming. One has but one mother, and there is nothing like her," she said with a tenderness that was very sweet to remember afterwards.

"So you have found that out, Delia. Late in the day, dear, late in the day."

Her clothes to be married in were laid out, white upon white like snow upon snow. Delia made her mother admire them, standing with her hand-in-hand. They were very pretty, as bride-clothes are always, be the bride glad or sad.

"You have a great deal to go through to-

morrow, Delia," her mother said, looking from them in her face anxiously.

"Yes, mamma. More and worse than it need have been. But there'll be no tears. I have done with crying.'

"I wish, my love, that it may be so."

"It *must* be so. I have some one else to think of now. So this I say—I cannot bid grandpapa good-bye in the morning. I shall be gone out of the house quite early—and that is why." Delia's voice was painfully eager; her grasp on her mother's hand made her almost cry out.

"Do you feel it like that, my poor child? Oh, I am sorry."

"He used to be so good to me, mamma. I think I loved him more than you all. I have grieved and disappointed him beyond everything, and I cannot bear the sight of his cold displeasure. I must go—let me go in peace."

"My darling, you shall go in peace. He has not ceased to love you."

"Then let me bid him good-bye to-night."

The judge had wandered down to the study again, restless as Delia's self, to stay for her mother's report. He came to her, and they had a few words. He began by saying that her marriage was too near now to make counsel available for anything but her duty to the partner in whose company she was going to walk through life.

At this point Delia with spirit spoke out: "He shall teach me that himself, gran'papa. Mr. Denys has, perhaps, more virtues than you give him credit for. If I have been good at all since I turned rebel, it is owing to his forbearance. We both should have been happier had submission to you been compatible with loyalty to each other."

The judge said drily that he was glad to

hear it—he was certainly surprised. And in this humour their parting was effected, and proved less distressing than it might otherwise have done.

"Mr. Denys has given you reason to believe that he respects me, gran'papa, has he not?" Delia said further.

"Yes, Delia, he has, indeed."

"And, gran'papa, I respect him too. I believe you have done him injustice. All I have seen of him, and know of him from himself, has my approval." Delia's face burned. She was conscious that her praise was moderate, but it was sincere, and she was pleased to be able to utter it.

The judge said no more, but he gave her his blessing. And she went, and kissed her grandmother.

When Delia was alone again with her mother, she said in a tone of appeal: "Now,

mamma, I want a little cheering with good prophecies. Tell me truly—did you care for papa the day you were married as much as you cared for him the day Walter was born—or as you care for him now?"

"First and last, my dear, I loved your father with my whole heart. Ours was a love-match."

Delia sighed. "Then, mother, let us have done. There's no comparison. You had better luck than your poor daughter. It was not written that I should make a love-match. But such as mine is, I will try to live so that some day we may thank God for it."

CHAPTER VIII.

HER WEDDING-DAY.

"The end is, to have two made one
In will and in affection."

BEN JONSON.

AULDCASTER woke up on the morning of the wedding without any of the jubilant sensations that ought to have attended a wedding from the House with Golden Gables. It was an August morning, and a sultry gloom overspread the sky, causing people to observe that there was thunder in the air, and the storm would come before night.

Mr. Denys had taken up his quarters at the White Hart, with a new travelling carriage, a pair of fine bay horses, and his own

servants. He had no friend with him; for there were to be no festivities. None of the neighbours, small or great, were invited to rejoice at the marriage. Nevertheless, the townsfolk came out into the streets, mustered up Rood Hill, and crowded into the church.

There was much curiosity to see the bridegroom amongst such as did not know him, and some disappointment that he was not more remarkable when seen. He was in the church ten minutes before the arrival of the bride, and sustained the scrutiny of the congregation without flinching. The majority were of Miss Delia's opinion—that he was not so very ugly. He stood a little over the middle height, and was solidly built—a robust and powerful figure of a man, forty-five years old, or thereabouts, naturally fair, but tanned to the colour of

a nut-brown berry. His light hair was thick, like thatch, upon his head, which was large, square, and well set on his shoulders. His clean-cut lips closed with a firm pressure, and he had the blue eyes of his race—eyes extraordinarily bold and lively, which looked thunder when he was angry, but were mild to-day as became the occasion. His countenance was cheerful, expressive of a heart in prosperity; and one of the spectators — the old country doctor who had known Miss Delia from her birth, and was very fond of her—gave it for his opinion, that she might have made a worse choice, a deal worse choice, and have gone away with flying colours.

There were no flying colours for her to-day. It was a dull wedding. The bride came attended only by her father and mother, two of her brothers, and the two girls from

the rectory. She was simply apparelled in a dress of white poplin, and a broad-leaved hat, turned up at one side, with a long feather. Her blushing soft grace of manner was very beautiful, and Mr. Denys gave great popular satisfaction by his visible pride and delight in her. The rector read the whole of the service, and a pin might have been heard to drop in the solemn rests and pauses of his voice. The responses were made by both as if they meant what they said, and before the ceremony was over many persons had wondered in whispers why the judge was so set against the marriage; for the pair seemed not unequally yoked.

They were to start from the church-door, and as they walked down the aisle together, it was noticed that the bride betrayed none of the tearful trepidation of a girl leaving her home for the strange house of a husband.

She had enough to weep for, if weeping would have availed her, but as she had told her mother, she must think now of some one else. And it was her compensation for their want of welcome to let the world see that she went to him with joy.

As soon as they were seated in the carriage, driving away on the road to Beauminster, Mr. Denys said: "You have behaved capitally, Delia, and I thank you"—his first words outside the church, made more emphatic by his first kiss.

Delia drew a long breath of gladness that the strain was over. "I have heard that you are always good to your own—and you will be good to me, will you not?" she said in a voice of confident appeal.

"I will be as good to you as I know how—so help me God," Mr. Denys answered with a glow of sincerity.

He felt and she felt at that moment very strongly that the hands which had been her defence had quite left hold of her. But he believed that she loved him best; and it is certain that she never gave any one the right to doubt it after that day.

The sweet clamour of the bells, the famous bells of Auldcaster, followed them far on the road. At three miles from the town, half-way up a long hill where it made a sharp curve, the carriage rested to breathe the horses. Delia wished to get out and walk a little, and take a last look of the valley. Mr. Denys gave her his arm, and they walked very gently to the top of the hill. Here they met a sturdy old woman with a brace of market-baskets going down to Auldcaster. She had carried butter and eggs to the House with Golden Gables for fifty years, and at the sight of Miss Delia, all in her white array, she dropt a curtsy, and

spoke with the kindly, respectful interest of an old servant of the family.

"God bless you, Miss Delia! You was married this morning?" said she.

"Yes, Mrs. Jesse, and this is my husband. Tell them at home that you saw us," said the lady, and Mr. Denys lifted his hat.

It was something for Mrs. Jesse to tell.

The judge and his wife were still in the garden, where they had waited while the wedding-party were in church. The others had come back to them there when the bride was gone, and they had stayed all together under the cedars in the scented warm air, some talking about it, some silent, hearing the rush of the bells, and hearing nothing else.

Mrs. Jesse delivered her message.

"And sister was not crying?" Cricket earnestly inquired. He had been crying, poor child.

"Crying! bless you, dear, no! What should she cry for? 'This is my husband,' says she; 'tell them at home that you saw us;' and the gentleman laughs, and takes off his hat, as proud and pleased as could be." Mrs. Jesse judged rightly that Miss Delia's words would bear repeating, and that her story was best told just as it happened.

Delia's mother was comforted.

Cricket said: "Give me my book. I wish she had gone with a bit of glory. I think she deserved it."

"And she was all the sister we had," said Walter.

The young people had not spoken or interfered before. It had seemed towards the end too serious and tragical for them to touch. But there was a curt finality in the scene coming out of church that had shocked them.

"Whose fault was it?" Walter said again.

"Her own fault," said her grandmother sternly, but there were tears in her eyes.

The judge and her father got up and walked away together, and Cricket opened his book to read.

"She is gone. We have lost her," he said, turning the leaves to and fro, with absent mind forgetting his place.

"Not lost her, Cricket. She will come and see us—often, often, we hope," his mother whispered.

"Will he let her come?" Cricket whispered back.

That was a question that had not occurred to any of them, nor to Delia herself. And only time could answer it.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE BRIDE'S PROGRESS.

CHAPTER IX.

HER NEW HOME.

"Now came still evening on, and twilight grey
Had in her sober livery all things clad.
Silence accompanied—for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests,
Were slunk—all but the wakeful nightingale;
She all night long her amorous descant sung.
Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires. Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw."

MILTON.

MR. DENYS proposed to carry his bride through to Cote all in the day. He hoped that she would love it the better for being able to date her bringing home from her wedding-day. His own mother had often so talked of her bringing home to Acklam by his father, and

Mr. Denys had no standard for good wives higher than his mother.

They made three stages of the journey, and accomplished it easily before the sun went down. They had left the storm behind hours ago. The thunder-clouds that hung over Auldcaster in the morning pursued them across the hills with salvoes and flying showers till past noon, and then rolled off in faint reverberations to the north. Their faces were set to the sea and westward, and it was the time of evening when shadows lengthen, and the reapers in the cornfields begin to look tiredly for nightfall and rest, that they came in sight of home.

There was no noise of bells to welcome them. Cote Church was an edifice of vast antiquity that had only one bell to ring the living to prayers, and the dead to burial. It stood upon a green mound, girt with a low

wall and screened by trees, close to the gate of the Manor House. This was a great square house with a waggon roof and low, thick chimney-stacks, plainly built of the stone native to the country. The windows were shaded by luxuriant vines, out of which hung clusters of pale roses and tendrils of jessamine. A wide expanse of lawn lay in front, and beyond that, looking from the gate, were glimpses of a garden through archways in clipped hedges of yew, where splashes of vivid colour glowed against the intense gloom of green. It was a quiet picture in the warm, low light, and beautiful to remember.

Just before the carriage turned in at the gate a gentleman came by, with a serious, mild face, bowed, and went on.

"Mr. Clarges, the rector," Mr. Denys said, and the next minute they were at the door.

They were old servants who were on the watch, waiting for the arrival of their master and his bride, and, as old servants, were likely to be hard to please. But their master looked in rare good-humour, and as the young lady appeared both gracious and handsome, they said, one and all, that she would do.

It was a very simple reception. Mr. Denys made the necessary presentations.

"This is Mrs. Brice, Delia, my mother's maid, and my housekeeper at Acklam since;" and Mrs. Brice curtseyed.

"And this is Knapp—my man, ever since I have had a man. We shall be ready for dinner in half-an-hour, Knapp," Mr. Denys said again in a comfortable, matter-of-fact way; and then he conducted his bride up the fine staircase, not unlike the staircase at the House with Golden Gables, and committed her to his mother's maid to be adorned

for the meal for which he was in such a hurry.

Phœbe came anxiously after in her bonnet and travelling gear, but was forthwith dismissed. "You may leave me to Mrs. Brice, Phœbe, and go and be taken care of yourself," her mistress said, and Phœbe went.

Mrs. Brice's countenance recommended her as a servant to be made a friend of.

Delia had got an impression at the instant of entering the house that it had been swept and garnished with the utmost pains and thoughtfulness to please her. It was an old house, and of itself perhaps not beautiful, but things had been done to give it grace and pleasantness. It was airy and fresh and sweet. There were flowers everywhere, and abundant light from sconces fixed against the dark wainscoted walls. The old fashions had not been abolished, but only adapted to newer

needs, and the finished effect was rich and full of repose.

After they had dined—and that ceremony was not suffered to be formally tedious—Mr. Denys invited Delia to come to her drawing-room, and see what he had done for her there. Evidently he thought that he had done wonders, and was impatient to display them. And indeed she would have shown herself ill to please had she not been touched with admiration for the beauty and glory that were revealed as they went in. It was a room some forty feet long, and wide and high in proportion, at the farther end of which had been thrown out an immense bay-window, that set as in a picture-frame a prospect of fields and woods, with the moon rising over the sea—the August moon, red as red gold, and barred with purple cloud, till it mounted into high heaven and hung there like a silver shield.

Delia was moved and silent, and Mr. Denys stood watching her for some reward.

"Now I think you must feel at home. Is it as pretty as the window that I have heard of looking into the cedars?" he said.

"That is only an enclosed garden-view. This is far lovelier. I have seen nothing to compare with this. I have not often seen the sea, and never with the moon and stars shining in such a sky."

"Then thank me for it. Call me by my name. I made this window just to gladden your eyes. Because I want you to be happy, and to believe that I love you; for indeed I do."

Delia thanked him with a sweet dignity. "We are strangers yet. Your name does not come to my tongue trippingly," she said.

"We shall be better acquainted. Everything comes in time to those who know how to wait."

Mr. Denys knew how to wait. He had learnt some useful lessons during that year which had been to Delia so dreary an ordeal, and in the result both were likely to be the wiser for it.

The bride's window looked down into the garden, which was visible in the distance from the gate.

"We call it the Dutch garden," Mr. Denys said. "You see those broad green walks? They are delightful in these hot summer nights when the moon is up. Let us go out there for a little while. The place has been kept precisely as it was planted a hundred and fifty years ago. It must have seen a world of people, lovers and others. There used to be a wooden balcony and steps down from the

old window, but we did away with them when we enlarged the opening. Perhaps it was a mistake; for now we must go through the house."

Mr. Denys talked fast, and moved on as he talked, drawing Delia by the hand. In the hall he seized a plaid of his own, and folded it about her shoulders with the practised art of a man who has had to take thought habitually for a tender companion. The door was not shut, and Delia stepped out upon the lawn into the full light of the moon, and stood gazing abroad at the serene majesty and splendour. Then she looked back at the house, and as Mr. Denys came and stood by her, she asked him if he had lived there always.

"Never, until you promised to come and live with me. Since then I have been building your nest. There is half a life-time behind

me, Delia. You shall be welcome to all its history, but not now."

"I will not be afraid of shadows if I can help it, nor jealous of what never belonged to me."

"That is well and kindly spoken. Will you take my arm? I want my young wife to be my best friend—I have set some hopes upon her. We turn this way."

This way was down a step or two, and then along a tile-paved path through an arch cut in the green wall of the Dutch garden, which appeared to Delia as if laid out in moonlight chequers of black and white. It was a sweet-scented seclusion, divided into four equal parts by turfed walks crossing at right angles, the centre being marked by a sun-dial raised on an octagonal base. One heard there the rustle of the waves washing the shingle to and fro on the beach when the day was

still, but got no bonny blue gleam of the water.

Afterwards, when she became familiar with the place, and knew it in the garish sunshine, Mrs. Denys did not much affect its trim monotony unless to entertain company there.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SUNSHINE—AN EMPTY HOUSE.

"The earth lay like one great emerald, ringed and roofed with sapphire;
Blue sea, blue mountain, blue sky overhead."

C. KINGSLEY.

THE splendid weather that Mr. Denys brought his bride home to held for a considerable while. A series of thunder-storms with bountiful rain had refreshed the earth at the beginning of harvest, and the country round Cote was in the perfection of its beauty. Delia woke to the enjoyment of new pleasures in this fair, pastoral land by the sea. Every day Mr. Denys had something to show her, somewhere to take her.

"It is paradise! I think I can live and be good here," she said with a soft enthusiasm that was half surprise at herself.

Mr. Denys did not remind her who went disguised in Eden. Her air of perfect well-being amused and gratified him.

"You might have escaped from some great city canopied with smoke, where the rain rains every day, and the whirr of money-spinning never gives over," he said.

They had gone up that morning to a ridge where nothing grew but gorse and little wild flowers akin to the wind. It was a lonesome spot, but very lovely. On both sides it ran down into the dusk entanglement of woods, and all that could be seen from it then was open sea, green wilderness, and sheep-fed down, with clouds of faint blue smoke hovering here and there, to the betrayal of solitary farmsteads and remote villages hidden in the

low, sheltered spots which the old builders favoured. Long since those villages have emerged into the open, and reached out their hands to one another. All that fine, indented part of the coast is fringed with human habitations. Houses cluster thick upon the cliffs where on that peaceful day were none of them, but only clumps of broom, and rows and groups of umber-stemmed pine-trees, amongst which the thatched roofs of Cote lay buried in their gardens out of sight.

On the right hand the high down closed the prospect, and the fields, arable and pasture, swelled to meet it with many gentle slopes and shallow depressions. There was no level line except the sea-line, and no house to be seen but the Manor House, set under a round wooded hill, with its numerous windows glancing in the sun.

"He has a beautiful share of the world who

owns all this," Delia said, looking straight before her.

"It is a partnership now—mine and thine, Delia. We will do with it what you like. Cote is your dower—your house till death."

His wife turned to Mr. Denys inquiringly: "What can we do with it? It is charming as it is," she said.

He began to tell her of the stir of life and prosperity at that period almost universal in the world—of out-of-the-way places roused from the slumber of ages by the shrill alarum of the railway-whistle, and of fortunate proprietors of land where main lines passed putting money in their purses beyond the wildest dreams of cupidity.

Delia was not moved to admire the prospect of rude changes. She said that she preferred her paradise in quiet.

"We are not likely to be tempted this year,

nor, perhaps, next," Mr. Denys told her. "But Sir Thomas Britton, over yonder at Marshleas, is all for progress, and Midas at Cambourne is with him. Cote lies between the two, and when the time comes we shall have to make up our minds whether to let it go with the stream or be stranded and left high and dry on one side. Cambourne is starting at a great pace already, but it would not be difficult to cut us all out of the world. If you observe the configuration of the coast, you will see that we live in a peninsula. Rowboro', which is our market-town, is on the isthmus that connects us with the mainland."

Delia listened thoughtfully, glad that there was no call upon them for instant decision, but able to foresee that neither might enjoy being stranded when their neighbours were rising with the tide. She had seen Marshleas from the sea, and Cambourne she had driven

through. Marshleas consisted of a grey-green mansion surrounded by watery pastures, and a few fishermen's huts on the low shores of the bay. Cambourne was a verdant bower amidst limestone crags, with intricate break-neck roads, a barn-like church, and a few cottages of labourers. Cote, midway between the two, was as primitive as Cambourne and almost as picturesque; but being open to the north, the air was more bracing, and from the lie of the land the climate was drier—the fault of all that region being a too great abundance of moisture.

Mrs. Denys had not yet walked about the village—Mr. Denys rather avoided the village—but he acquiesced when Delia proposed that they should take a turn round that way on the road home. It was a winding road, and at several points composed into lovely pictures with the sea for a background. The first

houses they came to were casemented stone houses, all under thatch. Here was the inn; the shop where bread, groceries, and drapery formed a mingled store; and the library and bazaar, where a few shelves of books, a few phials of drugs, and a scanty miscellaneous collection of shells, pebbles, toys, and stationery, invited strangers to read, take physic, and carry away a small memorial of the isolated village. Wherever there is sea, and easy access to a pleasant beach, strangers will find their way, and though Cote had provided no special accommodation for them, there were over the shops and elsewhere some little rooms where gentle people were contented to eat and sleep for a week or two of summer weather, in consideration of the charms that were to be enjoyed out of doors. And every year of late more had sought to come.

Beyond this cluster of houses the road bent

uphill, bordered by tall hedgerows and overhanging trees. A lane on the right diverged to the cliffs and the way down to the shore. The cliffs at Cote were severed by a deep wooded glen, wide at the mouth next the sea, and narrowing as it ran inland until it was lost in the copses under the down. High up on the sunny side, and well sheltered at the back, were a few cottages of gentility, enclosed in gardens that mounted by slopes and terraces of rude, irregular construction, by groves of bays, myrtles, and fuchsias, by stone steps and rows of pines, grotesque and shadowy. The position of these cottages was very fine, but an old house, called the Glen House, occupied on a lower level a site more delightful than any. It was accounted, indeed, the most characteristic and beautiful spot in Cote.

Nothing was to be seen of the Glen House

from the road. Beeches and sycamores and the dusky ilex cast a wavering gloom over the lane, and hedges of yew and holly made an impervious screen below.

"It is not inhabited," Mr. Denys said as they passed the gate.

"Then may we go in, and see the view?" Delia asked.

"Yes—yes, if you wish it," he said, and turned with just a perceptible shade of reluctance.

A thought had flashed into Mrs. Denys' mind, but it was just too late. A gardener at work close inside the gate louted low to the squire and the lady, and Mr. Denys walked on, not speaking, but looking about as if he had not lately seen the place, and was noting changes.

The house had three low gables in front, and wide lattices glazed in the Venetian

manner. The roof was thatched, and the walls were completely clothed with myrtle. There was a magnolia in blossom sheltered by a projecting wing, and roses in profusion dropped over the light iron fence that protected the cliff. The turf was like velvet, and even the Dutch garden at the Manor House could not more than vie with the jewelled mosaic-work of the flower-beds and borders. The place was kept with the most careful labour. Not a weed, not a faded leaf, appeared anywhere. And yet it was an empty house. The windows were closed and darkened as if one lay dead there. But the dead and the mourners were long gone out of it. It was only an empty house.

It stood on a plateau fifty feet or so back from the edge of the precipitous sandstone cliff, where it made a hollow curve, facing the mouth of the glen, which was full of trees.

Looking from the rustic verandah across this expanse of foliage, tinted with early autumn and softened by sunny haze, the view dropped abruptly on the sands, where a thread of water ran into the sea. And here a few boats, fishing-nets, crab-pots, and bare-legged men and boys in blue jerseys and red night-caps, gave life and animation to the scene.

"You can guess what this place is, Delia?" Mr. Denys said.

"Your former home: I am so sorry, Hugh;" and Delia sounded very sorry, indeed.

They did not say much, but Mr. Denys led the way down a hollow green walk between two rows of beech-trees, mossy under foot and cool over head, with boughs arching and interlacing—a very sweet spot, a shade and a silence apart from the world. On the outside of the trees was a path wide enough

for two, which skirted the cliff, and had a margin of wild garden and bushes that in the season were garrulous with the chatter of birds.

"We were always here when the spring was turning to summer," Mr. Denys said. "It was the time of the year that Agnes loved best. She was a hopeful soul."

They had come to a seat where the prospect was open towards the house, and Mr. Denys invited his wife to rest there while he went farther. Delia accepted the invitation, taking it for a command.

She had determined already on her line of behaviour—she would be nothing but good to her husband as concerning the former circumstances and events of his life. If she trespassed, it would be by accident; if she did not perfectly sympathise, it would be through ignorance. She perceived that there was a

soreness in his recollections of past years, though he never spoke but of their sweetness.

This thing seemed to her especially hard —to have sons that he loved and was proud of, and not to have them with him, and a little maid-child besides whom he never saw. Delia had heard of her from Mrs. Brice. She was a baby when her mother died.

Mrs. Denys set her heart to consider whether she could not change this for the peace and comfort of them all. Pride whispered that it might be safer to let well alone. But Delia desired to be wise, and wisdom is a loving spirit.

The next Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Denys went to church at home — to Cote Church. They had gone to Cambourne, and farther still, to say their prayers on the previous Sundays, and Delia had not yet been within

the gates. As they walked up the path the bell was performing its five minutes' ritual of ringing the people in, and Mr. Denys drew his wife on one side to wait until it ceased.

The churchyard was pretty of itself, and the pretty custom prevailed of putting flowers upon the graves. Near by where they stood, below the east window, adjoining the vault in the chancel where mouldered the bones of all the Denyses who had died at home, was a grave, and three in it for company. A granite slab against the wall enclosed a lozenge of brass, on which their names were written :

"Marie Theodora Denys. Marie Placidia Denys. Marie Agnes : their dear Mother."

A cross and three crowns lay upon the green grass above the dead. They were never forgotten.

They had been taken all together. "It was the fever," Mr. Denys said, alluding to the familiar enemy of rich and poor at Cote.

Delia bent her head, deeply touched, not attempting to speak.

In a simple, pleasant tone as if it were nothing, Mr. Denys added: "When my time comes it is my wish to be buried next them. There will be your place over beyond me."

Delia drew herself up, shuddering strongly: "It is soon to talk of dying, and only married the other day," she said, and the moment after: "Look, Hugh! there is somebody walking over our grave."

It was a very little girl, beautifully dressed in white and carrying a posy, who was making her way on the level sward to the mound. She laid her offering by the cross, and then knelt down and lifted her hands in the attitude of supplication. There were many witnesses.

The rector hurried by—a good man apt to be five minutes late—shedding a tender, pitiful glance on the small devotee and a benign smile on the squire's lady.

"Is this your doing, Delia?" her husband asked in a quiet, neutral voice.

Delia said first, "No." But that was not quite true, perhaps, and she made haste to add: "It may be. If you are glad she is here, so am I. After service I will tell you."

The child's attendant was a lady in black, who stood behind her, and took no notice of anybody else. Her dress was much like that of an Anglican sister of charity. In fact, she belonged to the religious house where, at the request of her mother in dying, the little girl had been sent to be taken care of and brought up.

Mr. Denys conducted his wife into church,

but presently went out again, and remained outside until the singing began, when he re-appeared with the child, and set her up on the seat next himself, holding her within his arm, from which vantage-ground she surveyed the congregation as if they all belonged to her. The old building was full to overflowing with distinguished visitors, many of whom, finding no room in pews, sat on chairs in the aisle, stood in the porch, and hung about the open windows, if by chance they might hear a word.

Mrs. Denys, from her spacious seat apart in the chancel, regarded them with compassion, and wished the church enlarged. It was a customary sight to the rector and his native flock, a sign of a crowded season that caused them to rejoice. During the hymn before sermon two or three ladies went out overcome by the heat, and all the younger ones amongst

the school-children, awakening some envy in the breasts of their elder companions arrived at the years of confirmation. The little girl, who had been contented till now with her father's knee, cast a glance towards the lap of the lady, white like her own frock, and after walking about a little came to a stand there, resting her hands and looking up in the sweet serious face. Delia looked down at her as she used to look at Cricket, and the child intimated a wish to be better friends. Then Delia lifted her up, and settled herself comfortably in her corner. The child intimated further that her hat and gloves must come off, and being relieved of these, she nestled softly down with a sigh of baby satisfaction, watched for a drowsy moment a bird flying amongst the brown old rafters of the roof, and then fell asleep.

Mr. Clarges had a very agreeable delivery,

and in his matter nothing exciting. It was a warm morning, and Mrs. Denys seemed to hear the humming of bees. They were humming in the land of Nod. The fashionable bonnets wagged, wavered, melted into a cloud with the round heads of the dearly beloved brethren. Her eyes closed, her face drooped over the child's flower-face. Mr. Denys blushed for them. The preacher looked down, and turned over two leaves of his sermon.

There was a famous painter in the congregation who had the pair full in view : " Wasn't it lovely ? " he said to a comrade at going out of church.

And that the squire's young wife made a soft lap for the motherless bairn was a favourable introduction of her to their tenants and humble neighbours. She was much talked of under cottage-roofs that day.

A man who knew him well, said: "Denys is a rough fellow, and will give her a sore heart before he has done with her;" to which a woman who heard him made answer: "So he may,—so he may. But she has got the love in her that's a sovereign heal-all."

There was no sign of the nun-like person when Mr. and Mrs. Denys, with the little girl between them, walked through the churchyard home. That lady was found in the Dutch garden. Delia suddenly bethought her of her promised explanation, but there was no need of it.

"I have remembered—it is an anniversary to-day," Mr. Denys said. "Already you have begun to put things out of my mind, Delia. This little Marie-Irene is four years old, complete since the sunrise, and they have sent her from her convent to pray at her

mother's grave. That was a promise when the good sisters took her in charge."

Little Marie-Irene had slept at sermon enough, and was very lively and active the rest of the day—a most affectionate child, and docile for such an energetic spirit. Mrs. Denys was even tired when she went away, but the tiredness was of a happy sort. It reminded her of the houseful at Auldcaster.

"I should like to have the noise of the little feet and voice always here. You cannot think how still it is when I am left alone by myself," she said, without considering.

Mr. Denys was silent for an instant, then he replied: "I have not brought you to Cote to bury you all at once. I ought to go to Navestock early this week, and you shall go with me. Let it be to-morrow—the country is beautiful before the corn is cut. I cannot

bring the child home: my word to her mother is sacred. Think of another toy."

"I want no toy, Hugh. Since we have shown ourselves at church, the people round about will call, will they not?"

"Some of them will, Delia, but we need not stay at home for them. We have not many neighbours. There is Mrs. Wilton, a daughter of Sir John and Lady Herrick, who made a poor match. She is the only young lady in the place likely to be a companion for you."

Mrs. Denys was silent now in her turn. Then she asked some question respecting Navestock, which caused her husband to regard her with a sudden surprised intentness.

"Do not you know that Navestock was dismantled and abandoned as a residence forty years ago?" he said.

Delia would have given much to keep the blush out of her face that betrayed how

immensely she was disconcerted. "No," she said, "I did not know that. I read a fine description of the house in the county history."

Mr. Denys turned his eyes upon the ground. "That was all true when it was written half a century back. It was a great and famous house once, but the fortunes of the family have been long unequal to its maintenance."

Delia had taken for granted whatever her lively imagination was pleased to depict in adornment of the original plain statement that Mr. Denys was very rich. If she was making discoveries, he was making discoveries too. He had it very much at heart to fulfil her expectations, and he did not quite know what these expectations were. Delia was anxious to drop the subject, but Mr. Denys went on to say that he had never cared to make a home of more than one house, and amongst the country

places that belonged to him he had chosen for their married life *this*—Cote Manor House—because of its being the ancient seat of his family. It was not grand, but it was grand enough for him, whose habits were early formed on simple lines.

Delia's cheeks burned at the thought of her magnificent castles in the air. "And for me too, dear Hugh, for me too," she said in haste deprecatingly, sensible all the while of a painful, shame-faced embarrassment.

Mr. Denys was blind to it: "We will go to Navestock; and when you have seen Navestock, afterwards we will go into Kent," he said quietly, as if something had been given him to reflect on.

Delia was relieved and glad. The tedium of life visits new homes, even the best, until with use and custom they grow friendly. She was restless yet, and the prospect of more

change and variety was agreeable to her. What was unknown was still a background for the bright weavings of her fancy, which she indulged again now with a sort of wilful delight in its recovered freedom. Mr. Denys was beyond the age of day-dreams, but perhaps his experience was better.

CHAPTER XI.

NAVESTOCK—UNDER A CURSE.

"The multiplying brood of the ungodly shall not thrive nor lay any fast foundation."— *The Wisdom of Solomon.*

Mrs. Denys had not to suffer in her early married life what young people of active disposition most dread—she had not to suffer dulness. They heard of her at the House with Golden Gables as driving about the country with her husband in his mail-phaeton, looking handsomer than ever, and wearing a becoming dress of fine dark serge, and a black plumed hat.

"My lady recommends a close-fitting

costume of that sort to Jem's wife," said Sir John Herrick, who was their informant. "Pretty Fan is rather too fond of light, bright colours."

"And how does Mr. Denys look?" Lady Daventry asked. Delia's mother winced at the question.

"Denys looks good friends with his company," Sir John answered. "We shall have to hold out a hand to him for your dear girl's sake. Luttrell was talking of them at the magistrates' meeting on Saturday at Beauminster."

Mr. and Mrs. Denys had been seen in Beauminster the day before. It had been decided on the road to stop the night there, and proceed to Navestock in the morning. The minster bell was going for evening service when they arrived as the Cross Keys. Delia would have liked to go to prayers, but Mr.

Denys was not prayerfully disposed, and did not judge it fit to let his young wife go alone. He pleaded business, and left her with Phœbe for an hour or two in a long, low room of the old inn, which had a line of windows looking into the Close, and a bow commanding the entrance from the High Street.

The owner of Navestock was known in Beauminster, and eager, deferential greetings met him at almost every step. Mr. Denys' ordinary manner was abrupt and cold, the reverse of a popular manner, and he did not once halt for a greeting until a gentleman having an air of some distinction came up with outstretched hand and audible inquiries how he did. This gentleman turned and walked with him the way he was going.

It was getting on for six o'clock, and Mrs. Denys was tiring of her solitude in a strange place, when an open carriage with a pair of

handsome bay horses driven by a lady passed up the High Street, and a few minutes later returned, bringing back the gentlemen. Mrs. Denys was witness to a very animated conversation scene between her husband and the lady. Delia did not admire her. Finally the strangers drove away, and Mr. Denys came upstairs to his wife in an exhilarated humour. It had done him good to fall in with old friends to whom he could talk with his old freedom, and he began to speak of them to Delia, not very delicately, but with the intention of prepossessing her in their favour.

"Some of you poor young ladies have wonderful great luck," he said. "That lady was as poor as yourself, Delia, until she captivated Mr. Essex-Brough."

"She must be much older than I am. Has she been married long?" Delia said crisply.

"No. She wears well. She does not tell her age at all."

Delia thought that the lady's face and figure told of six-and-thirty, but she did not express her opinion. Also she thought her bold-looking and boisterous, but of this too she was reticent. She inferred from her husband's sudden elation of spirits that they were amongst his favourite and familiar associates, and she listened attentively while he explained them further.

"She was Miss Charlotte Deane Foxe, a daughter of Sir Martin Deane Foxe, a capital horsewoman. Mr. Midas at Cambourne is her cousin. They are living now at Lingfield, a fine place midway between Beauminster and Navestock, but they do not get on well in the clerical society here. He talks of selling it, and coming out Cote way. Cote has not too many neighbours, and you

might find her an acquisition. She is a clever woman."

Mrs. Denys' countenance did not promise a very cordial welcome to Mrs. Essex-Brough, but she said "Yes" musingly. She was considering that so far as neighbours went Cote was unexplored country yet. Cricket had acquainted her carefully with the names and standing of the county families within a twelve miles' round. She desired to begin well, and was not without rules and precedents for so beginning. At Auldcaster the best society in the best sense was all she had known, and her experience was sufficient to warn her that the lady loudly jesting and laughing at the inn-door with Mr. Denys was not of the type and good form she had been used to.

On the way to Navestock the next morning they called at Lingfield and took luncheon,

the mail-phaeton being sent on with notice that they would follow shortly. Delia was not quite pleased with the arrangement, which had been made without consulting her, and she was not apt at concealing her feelings, but Mrs. Essex-Brough made no sign of regarding them. She talked with lively fluency and inobservance, decided at a glance that Mrs. Denys was very young in the ways of the world, and probably very tame. Her manner of offended princess she found rather absurd, and then she thought of her no more, but devoted all her attention to Mr. Denys. Delia was not angry, but in her own mind she called Mrs. Essex-Brough odious, presuming — a pale, sallow woman with a great mouth and roving eyes. Mr. Denys knew the fastidious turn of his wife's lip, and the other lady was sensible presently of being checked and curbed, and her familiarity held

in. Mr. Essex-Brough sat silent, his arms folded across his chest, and his chin down, eating nothing and speaking seldom. His features were refined, but he was not agreeable to look at. He had a bad countenance, Delia said to herself, almost suddenly becoming aware of it. Altogether she did not like these friends of her husband, whom he seemed desirous of making her friends too.

After luncheon Mrs. Essex-Brough undertook to drive her guests to Navestock. The distance was about three miles through delightful scenery. When the carriage turned off the highway in at a stout wooden gate, it rolled smoothly along a good road, on both sides of which the wheat was ripening unfenced. The expanse of undulating ground was clear of hedges and bare of trees, saving isolated groups and single trees spared for their beauty, or to relieve the monotony.

"It looks like a park sown with corn," Mrs. Denys said, gazing about curiously interested.

Mrs. Essex-Brough answered her: "That is just what it is. At the top of the next rise you will see the house. If it belonged to us, I would have it pulled down. I would sell the materials or burn them, and pass the plough over the site. Then, perhaps, there would be no more curse."

Mrs. Denys wished this rude woman were out of the way with her terribly coarse suggestions.

"There it is, Delia, there is Navestock," said her husband, and she leaned forward to contemplate the exquisite scene.

It was exquisite indeed, but strange, but unexpected. The house stood out white and clear, a vision of architectural grace, against a waving sea of golden grain. There was no

wilderness of neglected gardens, but everywhere labour and rich culture. The fine plan of the terrace could be traced looking down the valley to the Avon, but corn grew on and under its slopes. The great centre flight of steps with their balustrade remained, and for a little way a footpath that was presently lost. Far as eye could see stretched a soft, luxuriant, rolling country, lilac in the far-off clouds of air, sun-colour, hot and vivid near.

"Did I not tell you that it had ceased to be a house and home forty years ago, Delia?" Mr. Denys said after a pause of several minutes, during which he had been watching his wife's face.

Delia's dumb astonishment continued unbroken. She looked at him, but her mind was absent.

The carriage, which had halted at this fine

point of view, drove gently on until it came under the shadow of the walls, then turned in at an archway below a magnificent overhanging window, and came to a stand in a great quadrangle with buildings all round it, and signs of life enough, but of a life that looked oddly out of character with its environments. Delia might have known it before had she heeded, or had her heart not been so set against hearing. And yet she could not remember that even Cricket had ever spoken of Navestock as degraded into a farmstead.

In the centre of the spacious square the pavement had been taken up to turn it into a fold-yard. A very populous fold-yard it was, and most comfortably well-to-do. Milch-cows drowsed in the warm, quiet afternoon, and families of pigs were fat and happy, knee-deep in trampled straw. Pigeons and barn-

door fowls were there in cheerful multitudes; and the house-dog, after one sonorous bark of warning to his friends, disposed himself in front of his kennel to receive the fine company with affability. His voice brought out men and women, a stableman and Mr. Denys' groom, a dairy-maid with her pails, and a large ruddy person in a white-bibbed apron, who called to the men to seek the master. This ruddy personage looked towards the carriage inquisitively, but did not approach.

"You see what it is, Delia—a great farm. It was done long before my time," Mr. Denys said, getting down from the carriage, and giving her his hand to descend.

Delia cast her eyes upwards, and saw through the rich, stone-transomed windows of splendid chambers that they had been converted into storehouses, granaries, and barns. The building was so strong that it might

serve these common uses for centuries yet. From one high opening hung a powerful crane; against another was leant up a wide-stepped ladder. A brick stairway had been built in a corner, and a window removed to make room for a strong oaken door.

The clatter of a horse's hoofs on the pavement announced the arrival of the master, who dismounted, and came up to Mr. Denys with the frank deference of a prosperous tenant perceiving his landlord. He was a young man, a modern farmer with progressive notions, who had been educated at an agricultural college, had succeeded to his father's place, and was filling it adequately. The ruddy personage still at the door was the widow, his mother, Mrs. Gooden.

Mrs. Gooden had no great favour for Mr. Denys, and none at all for Mr. and Mrs.

Essex-Brough, whom she knew well. She waited for them to approach before stirring to offer her welcome, then to Mrs. Denys she curtseyed, relaxed, and was gracious. News had come to Navestock of the marriage at Auldcaster without consent of friends, and had raised no wonder; for the Daventrys were a family of honour and renown in all that part of the country. Mrs. Gooden admired the beautiful bride, but thought her not to be envied, whether she had married for love or for money, as the tale was told to her. She had a long memory, and knew many things.

"The young gentlemen are out, and about somewhere with their guns," she informed Mr. Denys curtly. "Half their time they spend at Lingfield. Bed and board, that is all they trouble me for."

"I am sorry they are not acceptable guests,"

Mr. Denys answered, looking her straight in the eyes.

"I never said so, sir," she rejoined, her ruddiness flaming into heat.

Mr. Denys turned to his wife, speaking in an undertone: "The boys are here, Delia. They ought to have met us. They will come in by and by when we are alone."

Delia knew the boys were there, and was well inclined towards making their acquaintance.

After this Mr. Denys signified that the two ladies wished to see the house, and perhaps Mrs. Gooden would act as their guide, or find a deputy while he transacted some immediate business with her son. Mrs. Gooden had better manners than to refuse the respect due to their landlord's wife, and, preceded by a woman-servant to unfasten shutters

and let daylight into the deserted rooms, she led the way herself.

The place had never been made a show of since it was dismantled, when the great sale that ensued was a nine days' work. Once it had been royal in its state and grandeur, but now it was denuded and dead-alive. Their footsteps echoed in the empty rooms, and their voices echoed too.

"It feels like walking amongst ghosts," Mrs. Essex-Brough whispered, treading with stage-stealthiness down the long ball-room, where the smell of must and mildew met them in the face like a chill breath out of a grave.

"This is the north side of the house. There is never any sun here—that is why it smells damp," Mrs. Gooden explained, seeing Mrs. Denys shiver. "It has never been used since——" She checked herself and hesitated.

"Since when? since what?" Mrs. Denys said. "You need not fear to shock me—I know. They say it was murder—I have no doubt it was accident." Her voice was low but peremptory, quite forbidding reply.

From the ball-room they passed into an ante-room which had furniture of a motley sort and a glass door opening on a flight of steps that led down into a small, square garden, turfed and intersected by straight walks. A perforated stone balustrade enclosed this garden, over which ancient lime-trees extended their branches, the only shaded green loveliness they had seen yet. Then they turned back along the floor where lords and ladies of successive generations had danced the corante and the minuet, the country-dance and the quadrille, until the lamps were finally put out after a grand

rout, which ended with hot words and perhaps a passionate blow.

"It was here they found him," Mrs. Gooden said, speaking with awe.

She had opened a narrow door formed of a panel in the wainscot to show the dreadful spot—a sort of stone entry at the bottom of a turret-stair, dimly lighted from above by a slit in the wall. The ladies would not go up. Mrs. Denys drew her breath through her teeth with an audible gasp.

Mrs. Gooden said again: "Just *here:* as if he had missed his footing coming down, and had fallen headlong. His neck was broken, and his flaxen hair all dabbled with blood from a wound in the right temple."

Mrs. Denys stared with a pallid face, and asked if she remembered it.

"I remember it as if it had happened yesterday. I was the wood-steward's niece,

a servant in the house, waiting on the ladies. The young man was bonnier than some I've seen, but real wild and wilful: no great loss if there'd been other sons, but there was none. It was the old story over again, and the curse come true. A quarrel with his father about money. It always is money, they say. Their voices were heard in loud contention and anger, but only God above was witness to what was acted."

Mrs. Denys moved away, and Mrs. Gooden's further moralities were lost in the creaking of the panel-door as she re-closed it.

Mrs. Essex-Brough muttered to herself, snuffing the malodorous air: "If I were wife to Denys of Cote I would not bring my babies to Navestock for all that it is worth."

Mrs. Denys caught her meaning, but offered no remark.

There was a name for each of the rooms

through which the ladies wandered farther. All were reduced to the same level of nakedness, but the fabric was scarcely touched yet with decay. The oaken floors were sound, the floriated ceilings sharp and clear. In the saloon looking south over the terrace, the great central window had many panes open, and the wind blew in pure and sweet. Certain iron hooks, from which stout lines stretched across between wall and wall, just high enough to clear the heads of persons walking underneath, told the reason why. The farmeress dried her clothes there in bad weather. Indeed, nothing was sacred now. The smell of cheese and apples was strong in the guest-chambers on the grand gallery that went round the hall, and dust was everywhere in the upper stories—dust of meal and dust of ages. And finally, for a climax of surprises, from a wing shut off by lofty, double-leaved

doors came a noise of children—of so many children that it might have been a school broke loose.

Mrs. Gooden explained it. "The labourers' families are accommodated in the west wing, which makes six good tenements. Navestock is a village of itself. The clergyman holds a service on Sunday afternoons in the chapel, and a comfort it is in the short winter days, for the church is over a mile off. You see,ma'am, when the park and pleasure-grounds were broken up for cultivation it seemed better to turn the old house to whatever purposes it would serve than to spend money on new buildings, when money, perhaps, there was none to spare."

When Mrs. Gooden launched into details Mrs. Denys' attention flagged. Her brain was busy with speculations on what she saw, and the interruption was not unwelcome when

Mr. Essex-Brough called for his wife, and they two drove off.

Mr. Denys was still engaged out of doors with his tenant, and Mrs. Gooden invited Mrs. Denys to her parlour and a cup of tea, which was a comfortable parlour and excellent tea. Phœbe presented herself with the tray, seeking instructions and looking serious. Mrs. Gooden, perusing the young woman's countenance, inquired whether it was the squire's intention to stay the night at Navestock, because, though he had stayed sometimes by the week together in the hunting-season and for the partridge-shooting, there was nothing fit for a lady, unless Mrs. Denys would be pleased to accept of her best room, which was plain, but sweet and dry as sunshine and fresh air could make it.

This told more than met the ear, taken together with her tone in speaking to Mr.

Denys of his sons; and Mrs. Denys rightly inferred that she had been received into favour by this worthy but formal and conventional person. Her husband had spoken of having business at Navestock for a week, and before accepting or declining the proffered lodging, she asked to be shown his customary quarters. To reach them she was conducted through the ball-room again, and though rough and bare quarters they proved to be, she said, nevertheless, that they would do. Phœbe's solemnity was abated in proportion as her mistress was pleased. She was one of those paradoxical characters who do not believe in ghosts, yet are mortally afraid of them, and being shown a passage that led by roundabout methods to the cheerful kitchen without going near the haunted door, she was heartened up to her duties, and the results were capital for a makeshift.

Meanwhile Mrs. Denys waited in the ante-room which opened on the garden where the lime-trees made a fragrant screen against the sun. By every token it was her husband's den. Here were guns and whips, fishing-tackle, foils, and boxing-gloves. Here were books of farriery, agriculture, sport, and law. There were maps and surveys on the walls. Here were old pictures almost extinct, and old pieces of furniture, without doubt the refuse of the great sale of forty years ago. Delia had that habit of observation which accurately registers details. The next room, which served apparently as a room to eat in, possessed a series of ideal landscapes painted in the tall panels of the wainscot, and in medallions above them was a series of family portraits. Delia wished they had been ideal too, but she could not deny her

husband's ancestry. They were a race of thick-set, strong-featured men like himself, and had delighted in exuberant fat women, if the witnesses on the walls were to be believed. The present Denys of Navestock seemed to be the first who had brought a beauty into the family.

As Delia contemplated the ladies whose successor she was, an indescribable feeling of humiliation crept into her heart. She recognised that they had not all been wrong at the House with Golden Gables; that she had indeed fallen on a prodigious blunder, that she had indeed married under a cloud of delusion. Navestock was an old place, Denys was an old name, but this she had failed to grasp—that a place may be old without dignity, and a name may be old without honour. If she could have seen this house with its desecrated chambers, its ugly

effigies, she would have paused, she would have understood the meaning and significance of such a dearth of treasures and glories, and would hardly, perhaps, have cared to make herself a unit in a line so ignoble.

But the deed was done, and by good-luck that had happened since which hindered regret, though her world of dreams lay behind her, and before her a life which had no glow of them at all: she had learned to care for her husband more than for any of the things that he could or could not give her.

This shabby museum of odds and ends collected to serve the day's necessities touched her sense of the incongruous, and the laugh was still on her lips when Mr. Denys came by some way unseen into the garden, and made straight for the glass door. This was the means of access to the house which he and his sons used always. Delia appeared

on the steps as he approached—light in her eyes, mirth in her face.

"Weary of waiting for me, Delia?" he said, running up to meet her.

"Yes, Hugh. I have been over this great house. It would lodge an army, but there is nothing in it so enchanting as my window at Cote with its beautiful view of the sea."

Mr. Denys was gratified by her appreciation of his gift: "Ah, you will find it hard to match that, whether at home or abroad. Now, Navestock never touched my heart at all, but it gives me an immensity of work."

"Can I help you? I should like to help you," Delia said with perfect simplicity of intention.

"Your life will be better furnished if you can take a real interest in affairs. There is a vast deal to do and think of in the

administration of estates in land, but perhaps it is scarcely in a young lady's way." Mr. Denys seemed at the same time amused and pleased by his wife's wish to help him.

"If you will let me learn things, I have notions, Hugh," Delia said modestly.

"So I have discovered," was his shrewd, laughing answer. He had discovered, too, that their notions were not always in accord. His standard was a long way below that which the Daventrys and Herricks measured by—the only standard Delia knew—and would have to be raised considerably before he would endure to have his actions tested under her inspection; for he ardently desired that she should believe well of him.

The sound of boys' clear voices in animated talk arrested what more they might have said. Delia was still standing at the glass door, and saw them coming. They looked

up at their father's call, blushing vividly both of them, but not more vividly than Delia herself.

"Here they are, George and John, the artist and the merchant," Mr. Denys said, and took his wife's hand, who moved forward with a sweet, kind stateliness to receive them.

The boys were handsome and perfectly well-behaved. They bore little resemblance to their English father, were dark-eyed and dark-haired, taller than he was, but with nothing like the promise of his strength. Their mother had never visited Navestock, nor had they in her lifetime, but since they lost her, when the Glen House was permanently closed, they had come there in the holidays, consigned to the care of Mrs. Gooden, who would perhaps have loved them better had they been of more trouble to

her. They were companions for each other, and so warmly attached that they were never separate in the country. Mr. Denys had given to all his children his own name at baptism, but his sons had a distinct understanding of their position; and though it induced some reserve of manner amongst strangers, they cherished no resentment because of it that could be detected. With their father they appeared on cordial terms, and when their father's young wife said kindly that she trusted they would let her be their friend, John thought that would be easy, and George with an odd, shy grace touched her hand with his lips.

They dined in company, and dined well, Mrs. Gooden's unpromising reception notwithstanding, and afterwards Mr. Denys proposed an adjournment to the terrace. There they walked in the balmy cool of the evening

between sunset and dusk, and the young people grew pretty well acquainted. Delia spoke of her brothers who were of the same age, an introduction which developed a latent sociability in both the boys. Mr. Denys listened to them, not taking much part in the conversation, and gradually losing himself in thought. They exchanged information about schools and professions. George and John had both gone from the first to international schools, spending terms alternately in London, Paris, and Vienna, acquiring the education of merchants destined to trade with the wide world, until George declared himself too much the artist to be anything else successfully, since which date he had been a student working hard at the Academy,

"George will presently go to Rome. I am going to Smyrna in the spring, to enter the mercantile house of the Czernys—our mother's

people," John said. "Next Christmas will be our last holiday together here."

"Oh, but you must come and spend Christmas at Cote. That will be merrier and happier for all of us," Delia answered in an expostulatory voice. She had taken to the boys. She was touched by their gentleness and frankness.

George asked rather quickly: "Shall you have our little sister with you?"

Delia told them of Marie-Irene at Cote last Sunday, and promised to have her at the Manor House at Christmas, if leave lay with her. "You will let her come, Hugh? the Sisters will let her come, will they not?" she said to her husband.

Mr. Denys roused himself with an effort from his fit of abstraction, and needed to have the query explained. But he did not relapse. The motherly impulse of his young wife

towards his children was very grateful to him, and he had not expected it. "If you make them feel that they have a home with us, my boys and their little sister, I shall thank you, indeed," he said, in a tone penetrated with tenderness.

Delia just put her hand within his arm, and they continued to pace the terrace until the stars came out.

George and John discoursed with animation of the pleasures of the sea, which they loved and had missed at Navestock, and of Cote and Cote people, making them known to Mrs. Denys from their point of view. There was old Crump, the agent, a name of fear, and Richard and Jack Blythe at the Orchard, names of renown, and the three Todds who were boatmen, and probably smugglers, and others besides to whom were attached familiar memories of boyish adventures.

Their father gave them some links of information. The years of their exile from Cote had not lapsed without events.

"Richard Blythe is married, but he goes on living with his grandmother at the Orchard," he said in the manner of one who imparts an unwelcome fact.

It was unwelcome; yet it seemed a mitigation of the boys' injury and bereavement that Richard and not Jack had got married. Their beloved Jack, entangled in the holy bonds of matrimony, could never more have been playfellow of theirs as he was once—their comrade in sport, master in woodcraft, helper in many a peril rashly and wilfully incurred. Delia knew their hero as well as a man could be known by his description before they had done praising him.

"The Blythes are a family of shepherds. Two hundred years, from father to son, that

family have had the Orchard. A good stock, but puritanical—a perpetual reproach to their squires," Mr. Denys said, explaining them further.

Delia looked up, feeling an edge in her husband's tone that was strange to her, and the boys were silent. Their glorification of Jack Blythe had touched some jarring chord of recollection in Mr. Denys' mind, which was suddenly re-awakened in their minds too, and the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER XII.

BELLS IN THE AIR.

"Man and wife are equally concerned to avoid all offence of each other in the beginning of their conversation. Every little thing can blast an infant blossom."—JEREMY TAYLOR.

NAVESTOCK was not more than a two hours' drive from Auldcaster for those who knew the cross-country roads, and over the hills by the bridle-tracks it was considerably less.

News was brought to the House with Golden Gables that Mr. and Mrs. Denys were at Navestock. Mrs. Daventry was hopefully excited. Cricket said: "Now, mother,

what do you think—will Mr. Denys let sister Dil come to see us?"

"We will send her a letter," his mother answered, with a soothing caress.

The letter went by a special messenger, and Delia had it early in the morning. She did not anticipate this invitation, and the surprise brought a joyful flush to her face. They were just rising from breakfast, they and the boys.

"Look here, Hugh," she whispered to her husband, holding him by the arm, and offering the letter to his eyes.

He read it, and looking down at her, said kindly enough, yet with a remonstrative tone: "I shall deny you nothing that you set your heart on, Delia; but I cannot go to Auldcaster, and judge you whether it be right and fair that my wife should go home to her own people for the first time without me?" He

was, in fact, amazed that she could propose to go.

Delia spoke not another word, but she wrote: "Dear, dear mother, I cannot come to you now. Tell Cricket we are on our way into Kent, and I shall write him a letter from Acklam, as soon as I have a long hour to myself."

Mr. Denys was going to be occupied with his tenant about matters that could give no entertainment to the young people, and he entrusted Delia to the boys, who promised to be her escort wherever she might wish to go. Delia could form no precise wishes yet, knowing nothing of the place, and to begin at the beginning, John asked if she had seen that *terrier* of Navestock that hung in the justice-room. Delia did not seem to know what the *terrier* was, and she had not been in the justice-room. John undertook to instruct her.

He had an historical mind that would have made him acceptable to Cricket. No one was more intimately acquainted with the annals and traditions of his father's family than John Denys.

"The *terrier*," he said, "is a roll of the tenants on the manor, with a map showing the boundaries, roads, and water-courses, and in what state of cultivation the soil was two hundred years ago. It is older than the house itself. They have a later survey shut up in a strong box somewhere, from which we know how Navestock has spread since it came into possession of the Denyses of Cote; but this is much more curious. Come and see it."

The lady was decoyed into a bleak and lofty room where defunct law-breakers had been brought to judgment before dead and gone squires, and where were preserved, be-

sides the map on the wall, a worm-eaten oak table and chair, unholy relics of that Denys of Cote whose black deeds had brought the broad acres of Navestock into his family, saddled with a curse. She examined it with an interest that increased as John's exposition grew long. It was worth his while to take pains with her; she wanted to learn, and Mr. Denys, dropping in on them unexpectedly in the middle of the morning, found her seemingly quite absorbed.

"At work in earnest already, Delia?" he said with an intonation that caused the colour to rise warmly in her face.

Delia's peculiar self-consciousness about Navestock was likely to be embarrassing. She replied that John had brought her there to give her a general idea of the country before taking her out. Now she was prepared to go. Her blush deepened as she spoke, and Mr.

Denys read her feelings at a glance. She had been distressed by the incident of her mother's letter, and was in a sensitive mood, vibrating at a word, at a tone in his voice even.

He turned to his sons: "Come up through Branksome Wood to the Three Beeches, and bring with you something to eat and drink. It is a pretty knoll, Delia, and you will find shelter from the sun nearly all the way. I will join you presently," he said, and was gone again as suddenly as he came, averting a peril—the sight of tears in his young wife's eyes.

Delia rallied her courage, and inquired of the boys how far it was to the Three Beeches. John said a mile, George said two, and they set off about noon when the sun was hot. It was a sweltering day without a breath of air in the woods. Delia wished they could feel

a breeze from the sea, but she persevered to the appointed spot, which was on the verge of Navestock Chase, and had the same glorious expanse of prospect as she had seen from the road on arriving.

The harvest was later on these high lands than in the neighbourhood of Cote, but the ripe corn was falling before the sickle to-day in many a long furrow. The boys found for the lady a good place where she could rest, and as their father delayed to come they fed her and themselves, and talked meanwhile of things past, present, and future, with a flattering confidence.

There are hours and scenes that memory photographs in a beautiful aspect. This drowsy afternoon at the Three Beeches was one. The distant hills were dim with mist of heat, and in the silence brooding over the plain Delia imagined dear, familiar voices.

George was observing her countenance: "What do you hear?" he said.

"I thought I heard bells. Can you hear Auldcaster Church bells all this way?"

"No. If you hear bells, they are Beauminster bells. I hear nothing but the thrumming of some creature in the long grass. What is it, John?"

George saw more than he cared to see, and was sorry for the break in the lady's voice. John looked up, and the brothers moved off in search, or feigned search, of the creature, leaving her to herself for a little while. When they re-appeared they had a proposal to make. John was spokesman.

"If you could be up at six o'clock, we would ride with you to Auldcaster in the cool of the morning. There is a beautiful little bay horse here that carries a lady—you might have all

the day to rest, and return after the sun has set."

Delia shook her head. "I am not so homesick as that," she said between laughing and crying. "But I do thank you both for the kind thought." And she did not forget to tell Cricket when she wrote him that promised letter.

When Mr. Denys came, he came riding that beautiful little bay horse that would carry a lady, and which he said he had brought to carry Delia back. It did carry her back, by the bridle-path through the woods and fields, her husband walking at its head, and the boys following, twined arm-in-arm lovingly. The husband and wife did not find much to say on the road. She was quiet, and he was grave. It was a retired way, but a right-of-way for all the world nevertheless, and they had not gone very far when they met Sir John Herrick and

his eldest son returning from Beauminster to Danesmore. Delia's face of sudden joy was like a call to them to stop, and stop they did, the gentlemen shaking hands, and Sir John good-humouredly expressing a hope that he should have the pleasure of finding his neighbours at home when he went next to Cote. For ten minutes they halted in a group, talking with a discursive confusion of a great medley of things, as Delia perceived when she came to think it all over afterwards. But it did her heart good that had felt quite sore since the morning.

"You will see them again before I do—I need not tell you what to say," was her farewell to Sir John.

He gave her a nod full of comprehension, and threw a glance behind him when he had ridden on. "If a woman's looks are to be trusted, she is happy enough," he re-

marked to his son, and his son agreed with him.

There was a dark blush on the face of Mr. Denys, and for several minutes, walking at his wife's bridle-rein, he said no word at all. Delia had quite cheered up, and was no longer shy of speaking. She told him that being so near to Auldcaster she would have liked to go home for a day, for her mother's sake and Cricket's — nobody else need have missed her — and asked, would he let her go the next time he brought her to Navestock? He answered that he would let her go *now*—had he not said so before?

"You know very well, Hugh, that I shall not accept such a grudging permission. I shall not go without you," was her rejoinder. Mr. Denys was pleased with it. His young wife's people had used him so hardly that he had

begun his married life with the angry intention of keeping her away from them, for fear, like a child gone to school for the first time, she might be distracted by thoughts of home from her new affections and duties. The danger seemed already inconsiderable, and Delia's method was persuasive. The resolution that tears and urgency would have confirmed and strengthened, her control and reasonableness absolved him from. He gave her no promise, but he left her in hopes that he would not continue obdurate.

They did not return to the house by the same way as they had quitted it, but, submitting to the guidance of George, went through a picturesquely ruinous waste place of broken walls clothed with old ivy, where the deadly nightshade made a purple contrast with the white bindweed and stinging

nettle all over the uneven ground. It was in the cold north shade, and here were traces of a moat imperfectly drained; for the soil oozed under the foot, and the print filled with blackish, dank water. This was the most ancient part of the house. The lower walls were blank and grim as the walls of a fortress; and high up the murky windows of the ball-room let in the reeking moisture, impregnated with seeds of death.

"The curse of malaria must have hung about Navestock in its golden days. One might catch a fever here. No need of any curse besides to carry off the children," Delia said, and covered her mouth, remembering Mrs. Essex-Brough's remark that had offended her, and esteeming it now a remark with much reason.

"You ordered this place to be cleared

out—it has not been touched," John said, looking to his father.

Mr. Denys did not speak; his silence seemed to express weariness of speaking.

CHAPTER XIII.

WEARING TO THE YOKE.

"Remember that marriage has a morrow, and again a morrow."
FREDERIKA BREMER.

"Do the duty which lies nearest thee—which thou knowest to be a duty."
CARLYLE.

MR. DENYS was never a man for much talk about things. Delia had discovered this soon, and having the gift of silence herself, she found it easy to respect her husband's taciturn humours.

That evening after dinner the boys vanished promptly, taking a hint from their father which the lady did not see. Mr. Denys rose too—it was not his habit to sit long at his wine—and giving his hand to his wife, they

passed into that miscellaneous den which was all the withdrawing-room they had. An old leathern seat, settle-shaped, of which the pattern stamped in gold was nearly worn out, had been moved up to the glass door, and there Mr. Denys cast himself down, motioning to Delia to sit by him.

Their attitude was sociable, and in the twilight their silence felt sympathetic. Delia was yearning to know what had struck her husband dumb. It was nothing but the vapour of discontents, the legacy of his dead past, evoked by the encounter with Sir John Herrick and his son, and in a little while her living breath, a touch of her living hand, made them away. The present reigned again.

"I am very glad of you, Delia," was his response to her gentle advances.

"That is good. Then tell me what vexes

you—or don't tell me, if it would be better not put into speech."

Probably it was better not put into speech. "What are these pretty beads about your neck — sculptured cherry-stones?" was the irrelevant query that came after a pause by way of answer.

"Nothing much more precious: I think they are the seeds of some foreign plant. Nurse Abby gave them to me when she left us. She said they were a rosary that she had from her first mistress, Mrs. Meade of Updeane. Here is the crucifix;" and Delia showed it, hidden in the folds of her dress.

"Ah, it is wrought gold, very curious: old Norman work." Mr. Denys fingered it, and let it drop, thinking, perhaps, of something else.

There had been mention of diamonds

between them for Delia; she wondered whether this was in his mind.

The next morning after breakfast Mr. Denys invited his wife to ride with him, saying that he wanted to take her where they could not drive, and farther than she could walk. "I want you to see what I am lord of here," he explained, and Delia made haste to be ready and go.

The day was cooler than yesterday. There had been a sharp rain in the night, and vegetation was refreshed. The atmosphere was clear, and the towers of Beauminster were greyly visible on the horizon. But it was not views or far, fair prospects that Mr. Denys was come out to see with Delia to-day. They left the beaten roads, and travelled across the fields from point to point as the crow flies, through gaps

of hedges sometimes, and sometimes by gates badly in want of mending with new ones.

"Have you ever followed the hounds, Delia?" Mr. Denys asked once when the little bay horse and she had pulled cleverly through a battered fence with a ditch at the farther side.

"No. I don't think I should have the courage," Delia said.

"You have courage enough. But, perhaps, you don't care for sport?"

"I think it is cruel for ladies. We had a rough little pony or two at home between our boys and the rectory, and they often gave me a canter on the Stray. It is pleasant riding on Auldcaster Stray."

"Mrs. Essex-Brough hunts all through the season."

"Don't bid me copy her, dear Hugh. I can ride, but I was never passionately fond of riding."

"I am sorry to hear that. You must ride at Cote, or often stay at home. I had that little bay horse broke on purpose for you, and Mrs. Essex-Brough has taken pains to bring him into perfect training. His action is very fine and his mouth capital. You must try to like him—he is yours. What will you call him?"

"You are very good to me, Hugh. What shall I call him! Let me consider—I will call him Phœbus."

Delia was grateful for her husband's gift, and amused him by putting Phœbus through his paces. "I shall not teach him any antics; he has too much solid merit," she said, and the next minute they were careering at accelerated speed down a green slope, at the bottom of

which was a low hedge of quick that Phœbus skimmed as lightly as a bird.

"It is warm weather, my wife," Mr. Denys said, overtaking her at his leisure. "Don't tell me that you are not fond of riding."

They went on, companionably silent, passing, now and then, near a farmstead or a group of cottages, all more or less picturesquely in need of repair, but halting nowhere until, on rounding a half-grown plantation of spruce, they came full in view of a house that it had screened. It was the Warren House, an isolated dwelling set in the midst of the fields, that had no approach but by a rough cart-track. Mr. Denys had given it for a shelter to the man who had contested his title to Navestock—to Ralph Denys, otherwise Wayland. Cousins they were called.

Thatch was its roof, where the stone-crop grew in golden cushions, and rubble were its

walls, white-washed, and stained with russet lichens. In front lay a small garden exhaling all manner of sweetness, and at the foot of the old walls was a vigorous growth of young plants straining upwards to cover their bareness.

Very busy in this garden, and to all appearance happily busy, were three persons, and one looking on—the workers a woman and two girls, not working-people born, but working with a will, as emigrants cast on a strange, barren shore might work on a hopeful day. The one standing idle was a man.

For a minute and not longer Delia saw the three stooping and moving amongst the bushes, then the man turned, straightened himself, and came towards the gate, taking off his straw hat to the lady with a sullen courtesy.

"Good morning, Cousin Ralph," said Mr.

Denys. "Good morning," said the other, and the two shook hands, but scarcely like men who are friends. At a sign from Mr. Denys the woman and girls approached, and he named them to Delia as his Cousin Ralph's wife and daughters. They had been gathering fruit, and the younger girl held up her basket of plums, ripe and purple, tempting the lady to eat. The elder stood at gaze, a finger on her lip, only wondering and perhaps envying.

It was a remarkable scene that Delia witnessed. She heard the girls called Angel and Diavola.

Ralph Denys had a visage lean and hard-lined—the visage of a man with a grievance which he lets gnaw at his heart constantly. On his wife's face there was the reflection of it, softened by much patience and much pity. She was not a lady, but she had

some of those graces of nature which nature distributes without regard to rank. Inclining her head gravely to Mrs. Denys by way of excuse for leaving her to the girls, she drew to her husband's side to listen to what he was saying. He had begun on his grievance, of course, but Mr. Denys was not in the humour to hear it.

"Don't hark back on that, Ralph," he said, with suppressed irritation. "You fought your quarrel to the bitter end, and left me but a hungry triumph when all was done. What am I here—what shall I ever be but steward of Navestock? You hate toil and trouble, and Navestock is nothing but labour and care from year's end to year's end."

"I would have had blood out of it yet!" cried the other with a passionate fling. "It is a poor heart that never rejoices! Oh, you are not like the fine old stock that ate, drank,

and were merry, pine who would to nourish their waste!"

Mr. Denys turned from him deliberately, and surveying the garden, spoke to the wife: "The flowers have thriven. I trust that the kitchen stuff, the pease and potatoes, have done as well?"

"Yes, sir, thank you. The seed was all of the best. We have wanted for nothing; but our needs here are few," she said with a strong cheerfulness that told her character.

Mr. Denys cast an eye over the girls. They were dressed in brown holland plainly braided with white, and wore sun-bonnets of the same material which shaded entirely their necks and faces. The mother was clothed in a similar fashion. Some of the worst ills of poverty she was able yet to stave off by dint of industry and thrift, and the

younger girl was her willing, effectual helper —Angel.

"And how about a shooting licence? If Ralph will carry his gun to levy war on the ground-game, the pot need never be empty," Mr. Denys said, satisfied apparently with the general results of his inspection.

The wife from her manner would have deprecated the leave to carry a gun, but her husband caught at it with cynical eagerness. "Let me have the licence, Cousin Hugh, and send plenty of ammunition. When I carry my gun, I have the false air of a gentleman still."

Mr. Denys nodded, turned his horse's head, and, leading the way, beckoned Delia to follow.

"Poor Ralph has great luck in that good woman. He would have gone to the dogs in raging despair long since but for her,"

he said, and gave a sigh to the dreary presence they had left.

Delia did not feel that she knew this story, and Mr. Denys was indisposed to tell it, except so far as his cousin Ralph was to blame for the pillage that Navestock had suffered under the lawyers in the lingering suit that had been between them—tokens of which were everywhere visible before her eyes.

They took the rough cart-track from the Warren House, which, after skirting the hedges through three fields, merged into a deep, hollow lane, and joined the high-road where the first scattered houses of the village formed the approach to the parish church. The parsonage was close by, the churchyard and parson's barnyard being separated only by a low wall of unmortared stones. They pulled up.

"Here is a picture for you, Delia. I warrant you never saw such a picture," Mr. Denys said, and looked from it to her.

Delia was startled. "I never did, Hugh," she said softly. "Never have I seen so much poverty in a day as I have seen since we set out on our ride this morning."

"And the poverty is mine," was her husband's grim rejoinder.

The church was centuries old, and had stood through many evil days, of which the present days were not, perhaps, the worst; for it was in quiet if it was in ruin. The gate opened on a pathway green with moss, and the graves were lost in the rank growth of grass. The parsonage was but a larger cottage with broken, falling thatch, and half the windows darkened with mouldering shutters. The village ale-house was

in sight and a cluster of village houses, all pictures of a like mean and squalid type.

Delia asked what the clergyman was about—was there no clergyman? Mr. Denys answered that there was a curate-in-charge who did the best he could, but the living was sequestrated. Delia understood what that meant—a shepherd out of the way, a sheepfold broken down, and a flock left to wander.

They rode back slowly to the desolate great house, passing more and more evidence of the want of money.

"There is nothing like this at Cote," Delia remarked once, on the aspect of an abandoned farmstead going to utter wreck.

"There is nothing quite so bad, but there are things bad enough even at Cote," Mr. Denys said.

He spoke in a tone and with an air of

making, once for all, a clean breast of some troublesome fears that were perplexing him. Delia gazed straight before her, drawing certain obvious conclusions which were not the less surprises because they were so obvious. The events of her life had changed their perspective quickly, indeed.

Mr. Denys after a short silence went on: "I have only Acklam to show you now—all the greatness I was born to. *This* was thrust upon me—Cote and this. And truly, Delia, I have been none the better for it!"

Delia turned her face to her husband with her beautiful look of goodness, and answered him: "Don't say that, dear Hugh. I am ready to share every burden you have. They used to tell me at home that I should never be happy without power and praise. This shall be my praise — not to want

diamonds to set me off, but good works such as the helpmeet of a poor rich man may find to do."

Mr. Denys thanked her. He was delivered from a secret anxiety. His countenance cleared as if a cloud had been lifted. "It is not a narrow life that is before you, forego what you may. If I take you at your word, will you ever reproach me? You are generous, but this is a long and severe test. Shall I tell you what it means?"

"Not now. Tell me by and by." Delia remembered how she had dreamt of velvet robes and coronets, of the world at her feet, of incense, homage, and cymbals of applause. "Yet I never cared for those things in my heart," she said.

Mr. Denys' views in his marriage had been quite simple and natural. In taking that yoke upon him he meant to wear it

with a good grace, and in this virtuous, portionless young lady, country-born and bred, he had looked to find a grateful, easy, and submissive yoke-fellow, who would give him children to be his heirs, guide his house, and keep him company in the dull decline of age.

For his comfort, she promised to be much more than this — a tender, true friend and loving spouse.

In the evening he told her a little of his fortunes that it was prudent for her to know. He told her that he had planned to live as free of Navestock as if it did not belong to him.

"You must never let your mind run on restoring it to its ancient splendour," he said, proving that he had made a silent note of her disconcerted manner on a former occasion.

Delia blushed as warmly now as she had done then, but she laughed too, and said that, indeed, she had no encouragement.

"My lifetime will not suffice to redeem it from debt," he went on. "Much of the land is gone out of cultivation, and desirable tenants are not to be found for farms where the buildings are falling down. Only Gooden's land is really well done to. His father had a long lease, and I have a scheme for granting other long leases which I expect will work and bring the estate round in the course of years. You may see it, but I cannot. Meanwhile, there is Cote for us to enjoy, and Acklam if you like it."

Delia was sure that she should like Acklam: it was in the midst of charming scenery, and within a drive of town.

Acklam was dear to Mr. Denys for better reasons than these. "Then to-

morrow," he said, "we will go into Kent. There I shall bring you acquainted with my people—homely people some of them, but not a knave or a fool amongst them all."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. DENYS' PEOPLE.

"Enjoy the blessings of this day if God sends them. . . For this day only is ours; we are dead to yesterday, and we are not born to to-morrow."— FULLER.

MR. DENYS was always at his best at Acklam. It was his birthplace, and the old home to him where were rooted the kindly fibres of early remembrance. He had broken some of them in his strong and self-willed youth, but they had grown together again, and had long ceased aching. If it had been his lot to stay there, walking in the paths of humble fortune, he might have lived like his fathers, useful and beloved, and have died like them,

leaving a good name to his children. But at the age when a man is generous and impetuous, if ever he is to be generous and impetuous, a mirage of great riches and position had opened before him, and the sacrifice of a pure and loyal love was asked in their name. He refused to make it, and he did right in refusing to make it. His mother was angry and he was hasty; and there was no prudent counsellor at hand to speak a moderating word, and bid him temporise.

Everybody blunders, everybody misses something, but Hugh Denys blundered more fatally, missed far more than the common run of men. His bark carried that precious freight which no money can buy—if only he had waited for a favourable wind. But in the sunshine, when the tide was flowing, all for want of just

a little patience, he cast away his hopes of a successful voyage, and got amongst perilous rocks on the shores of an island out of the main track of ships. It was not a desert island. He was not solitary there, not without joys, but he had the heart of a man, and must have looked with longing often to the great highways of the sea where life is adventurous and full of meaning.

It was a bitter day that brought the news to Acklam. His mother never looked the world in the face after.

"Not married, not lawfully married, yet living as man and wife together, my son and Agnes?" she muttered miserably.

No plea availed with her to whiten their sin—she called it their *sin*—and their sin was her shame. Her son visited her from time to time, but she never saw Agnes

any more, nor did she once see his children.

A paradoxical sort of respect was paid to Mr. Denys always by a few men and women who knew what his misfortune had been. His young wife noticed it first at Acklam. The clergyman, who was of much the same age, called him by his name, and went to and fro in the house as none but the oldest and dearest intimates ever do go. This gentleman, with a touch of confidential enthusiasm, thanked Delia for being so good to Hugh Denys, and told her that she would not lose her reward. Delia was troubled and confused for a moment, but she did not esteem her husband's friend the less.

It happened to be true September weather while they were at Acklam, thick dews on the grass in the mornings, hot mid-day

sun, and sweet, still evenings. The house-door stood constantly open upon the garden, and Delia had a sense of peaceful, easy life there. Knapp and Mrs. Brice had arrived before their master, and the order of the place went on as if it were always going. They had quiet dinners with a guest or two nearly every day—relatives or friends of Mr. Denys, who arrived from London in the late afternoon, and left the next morning in time for business. They impressed Delia very agreeably, and they were one and all agreeably impressed by her. She appeared to them a beautiful young lady of gentle manners and strong mind, who did not talk much but listened well, and seemed kindly disposed towards her husband's people, and his friends before his marriage.

When they had been a week at Acklam,

Delia was willing, and even glad, that their stay should be prolonged; for when they returned to Cote she understood that it was to be for the winter. The house was not large, but it was large enough, and full of quaintness — a chequered hall, parlours low and gloomy, with deep window-seats where you could lie and read, and smell the flowers, and hear the birds sing, all in a rural shade and simplicity. There had never been money to spoil the old house by way of improving it, but it had been kept in sound repair, and the old silver, old china, and old linen were in good condition for service still.

"Everything is as my mother left it, and as she liked it," Mr. Denys told his young wife. "Brice wanted new things when her mistress was alive, but now she says the old are better—and so do I."

"It would be a pity to change them. If we were not to live at Cote, I think I could be contented to live here," Delia answered.

Mr. Denys said he should not like to put her to that proof. "But it is within easy reach of London, and if you do not care for a house there, we may have enough of its noise and amusements in the season by going up from this place for a few days at a time."

"Did you contemplate giving me a house in London? Oh, but I should like that, and to be presented!" Delia cried with an air of Mistress Pride again.

"You shall have what you would like, then," her husband said quietly.

Mr. Denys seemed the very pattern of a considerate, indulgent husband. Delia might have encroached, she might have been capricious and exacting with impunity, had

that been her humour. But she was, on the contrary, perfectly obliging. One morning there was a letter by post over which Mr. Denys cogitated in silence some minutes, reading it a second time. Then he gave it to her. It was from "Aunt Alice," Mrs. Bulkeley, a sister of his mother, inviting him to bring his bride to visit her at "Barn Oaks."

Delia smiled over the letter, and said: "Take me, Hugh."

"Don't imagine from her expressions of humility that Aunt Alice is a humble person, Delia. Mr. Bulkeley is a Member of Parliament, a justice of the peace, and belongs to the rich fraternity of brewers. Barn Oaks is one of the few fine old houses left in the neighbourhood of London, which he bought, and improved to suit himself. He will tell you that he has spent a fortune on it. If

you are interested, he will tell you every item of expense."

Delia determined not to be interested, but she liked well enough going to Barn Oaks. It was, indeed, a very fine house, and gilded and blazoned in the very finest taste. Mr. Bulkeley had bought it as it stood when the family that had owned it before him fell into decay. In the hall and on the staircase were their portraits, going back to the days of the Young Pretender, concerning whom there was a legend that he had slept a night there on his last visit to England; in witness of which his room was shown, and the very bed he slept in, and a likeness of a man in armour that anybody not embarrassed with authentic memories of that historical hero might accept as his.

Mrs. Bulkeley had prepared a delightful

entertainment for her visitors from Acklam on the afternoon of their arrival—a reception, with music in the gardens—at which "the bride of my nephew, Mr. Denys of Cote and Navestock," was explained as a granddaughter of Judge Daventry to the majority not entitled to claim a personal introduction. Some of the guests smiled at these asides of the proud humility for which the lady of Barn Oaks was famous, recollecting that rebuke of the judge to Mr. Denys—a winning suitor in a bad cause—of which she was probably never informed.

Mrs. Denys was the newest and quite the loveliest face and figure there. She wore her wedding dress and hat, and shone conspicuous in the grace of simplicity, admirable above envy, with a distinguished repose and a most charming expression of sense and sweetness. To her husband's rich kinsfolk

of the City she was as modestly gracious as the most exacting could wish. She became a sort of standard and tradition in that society, which she did not much frequent afterwards; and friends at Barn Oaks who saw her on that day were heard in later years diminishing the pretensions of succeeding beauties with the unkind comparison that, beautiful as they were in their way, they were not so perfect as Mrs. Denys of Cote.

Mrs. Bulkeley was inclined to apologise to Mrs. Denys for her company, saying that there was nobody, literally nobody, in town in September, but to Delia, whose fashionable experiences were of the slenderest, there seemed to be a considerable residue of very fine people left amongst the crowd scattered through the gardens. And they enjoyed themselves. They were not of that rank and degree to which belong ancestral houses

in the country, but of the upper, moneyed middle-class whose places of business are open all the year round. The fashion of a universal exodus had hardly yet set in, and though Mr. Bulkeley spent annually three weeks with the grouse in Scotland after Parliament rose, both he and his wife had the courage to avow that their happiest holidays were spent at home, at Barn Oaks, when long acquaintances came to stay with them, and were satisfied with a visit to Drury Lane, to Westminster Abbey and the British Museum, in the simple way of visitors from the country.

The reception in the garden was followed by a small dinner party, at which the bride was presented to the best known of her new connections—Sir Oliver Denys—a stately and handsome old man who had been Lord Mayor of London in famous times,

and got knighted for his hospitality in feasting royal guests.

Sir Oliver came attended by a lady known throughout the family as "Cousin Elizabeth Paul." She was no cousin, but her title to cousinship was allowed because Sir Oliver had acknowledged her as his heiress, and to stand well with him, it was supposed to be essential to stand well first with her. She had won her place by the practice of no low arts. Sir Oliver knew her parentage when he adopted her at the solicitation of his childless wife, who had been dead now some years. As a girl she had given no promise but of average sense, and she had grown up into a woman of talents, wise-hearted and clear-headed, but a sad little woman to look at, being very small and deformed. She had a fine head and pretty features, and her eyes were wonder-

fully intelligent and beautiful—so remarkable, indeed, that it was no uncommon thing for strangers who saw her but casually to carry away an impression that she was altogether a beautiful person.

That was Mrs. Denys' original impression of her. Her age must have been over fifty now. She wore her own hair, which was white as silver and very abundant, and a dress of grey satin with a profusion of delicate lace to shroud her deformity. She took a leading part in the conversation, and everybody, not excepting Sir Oliver, deferred to her with kindness and respect. That her influence was likely to be a prevailing influence with him appeared evident. Mr. Denys had praised her to Delia. She had always taken his part, and she inclined at once and spontaneously to his young wife, a disposition that she was at no trouble to conceal.

The next morning she invited Delia to lend her an arm, and to walk with her in the sun for an hour by the river. During this stroll Mrs. Denys learned more of her husband's early life than it was, perhaps, in the power of any one else, unless it were himself, to tell her. He was not communicative except by chance, when some incident or object touched a chord of remembrance, and made it easy for him to speak; nor had Delia any of that dangerous curiosity which tempts some women to search persistently into what is best unknown. She had been abundantly warned before her marriage that Mr. Denys of Cote did not enjoy a general popularity, nor a general esteem, and the reasons why were set forth in terms so uncompromising that the very breadth of statement caused her to doubt of its absolute truth. Cousin Elizabeth Paul gave her more light.

"Hugh Denys has great capacity and great force of character," she said in the manner of a person who forms her own opinions and cherishes them. "He did well at Rugby—very well—but his father died just as he was leaving, and a father's hand is missed at that age. His mother was a good mother till she became ambitious for him in a foolish, proud way. The girl he loved was a treasure. That was a sad story — a very pitiful, sad story. Of course, you know it?"

"Yes, I know it," said Delia gently. "It is easier to be sorry for both than to blame either."

"I was very sorry for both. It went hard with him when he would have taken up his position as Denys of Cote. None of the public duties were given him to do which provide country gentlemen with occupation. Then he had a suit with a neighbour, and won it,

but with a loss of honour. It has always seemed to me that he was unfairly handled by the judge before whom that cause was tried. The law was on his side, and the judge went out of his way to condemn him on a question of honour, using some forcible words of Pericles for the purpose, which made the thing the better to be remembered."

"It was Judge Daventry, my grandfather. I have always wished to know the truth about that," Delia said, blushing painfully.

"With those who loved him, Hugh Denys needed no exculpation, and those who were prejudiced against him before wanted none, and would listen to none. The case was never fully heard in court. Hugh and his witnesses were examined and cross-examined with all the power and ingenuity of malicious suggestion that counsel could bring to bear

against him, and when his opponent should have been subjected to the same pressure, he avoided it by meeting half-way the defeat that he foresaw. Had he dared the ordeal of the witness-box he would have had dragged out of him a long tale of petty tyrannies and sharp practices such as abundantly justified Hugh Denys in the high-handed act which he was appealing to the law to enforce. Sir Oliver was always of that opinion, and other persons, equally able to review the case, have said since that for once Judge Daventry's sagacity was at fault. And very injurious to poor Hugh his blunder has been."

"Some day I will tell grandpapa—but perhaps he would not be convinced. He would never admit that Hugh could be justified in doing wrong in retaliation of wrong that he had suffered. And though

I am his wife, it would not be possible for me to admit it either." Delia spoke with a vivacity and earnestness that laid open in her an abstract love of justice, as distinct from personal loyalty—its commoner form of manifestation in submissive wives.

Cousin Elizabeth Paul smiled. "But we do not consider that Hugh did do wrong," she said. "But whether he was blameworthy in that affair or whether he was not, those who have argued from it that he is a grasping and cruel man are people who do not know him. He is masterful, and he has a long memory for offences, though I should not call him oppressive or vindictive. Naturally, as a great landowner, he has much in his power, but he is not possessed by that insane love of money which was like a heritable disease in the elder branch of his family. The Acklam Denyses have never

made haste to be rich, and there seems no reason why their moderation should not be transplanted to Cote with them."

"Hugh appears to me kind, and I know that he is generous, but we may have much to learn of each other both for better and worse," Delia replied gently, with an air of dismissing the subject.

She did not care to discuss the humours of her husband, nor the secret springs of his actions, though she was well pleased to hear old stories re-told in a less hurtful aspect than she had heard them first. Anything that was good of him, *that* was welcome to her: and as for what was not good, if it was past let it be buried, and if it was a tendency let it wait to be discovered. She was wisely afraid of a suspicious habit, and put away from her resolvedly any thought that might breed it.

Cousin Elizabeth Paul felt that she had said enough, and perhaps more than enough, considering that it was to the wife of Hugh Denys she was speaking, but Delia looked amiably on her, and she was re-assured. Her intentions were pure, and Delia was quick in deciding that amongst her new connections whom she must cultivate as friends, Cousin Elizabeth Paul deserved a chief place.

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CHAPTER XV.

SIR OLIVER DENYS—AN OUTLOOK INTO THE FUTURE.

"By doing good with his money, a man as it were stamps the image of God upon it, and makes it pass current for the merchandise of heaven."—RUTLEDGE.

THE visit of Mr. and Mrs. Denys to Barn Oaks was the first stage in a progress that they made under hospitable solicitation from house to house until they had gone the round of his kinsfolk and dear friends residing in and near London. Delia treated it as an agreeable duty. She was in her element, fêted and flattered, consulted and caressed, and her letters to her mother and

Cricket at Auldcaster told of nothing else but amusement, contentment, and happiness.

Mr. Denys did not care for so much visiting and fine company, and was perhaps occasionally bored, longing to be elsewhere. The hunting season had begun down in his county, and that was the season of his delight. But the end of October had come before Delia announced herself as being ready to return home—foregoing even then an invitation to Sayes Court, Sir Oliver Denys' house out of town. They went back to Acklam first, Delia with an air of pretty, reluctant sacrifice only half affected.

"I perceive that I have married a young lady who loves the world," Mr. Denys said, rallying her.

"Yes, Hugh, and to enjoy my life. Now is the time. Cannot you grow young again for me?" was her answer.

Mr. Denys was not without goodwill. Delia asked when he was going to introduce her to the homely people he had talked of. "Are they not homely enough, these rich brewers and bankers and merchants? They have given you a very warm-hearted welcome," he said. Delia was more than satisfied with her welcome.

"They have, indeed, dear Hugh, and I am glad they like me. Your people have been much better to me than mine have been to you. Mine have not been good to you at all."

"But you have been good—let the rest go! We are clannish, we Denyses of Kent. I am the head of the family, and you are my wife. It is our custom to like one another and to hold by one another. We have been the bundle of sticks, and here we remain, three generations living at once. The curse of

Navestock will have much ado to scatter and peel us."

"I do not believe in the curse of Navestock," Delia said, and shuddered involuntarily, belying her words.

"The Acklam Denyses were not at its earning," her husband replied, and ceased from the subject, noticing that she disliked and was perhaps afraid of it. He had never spoken of it to her directly before, and her allusions he had never taken up. There had been a tacit avoidance of it, but by a curious coincidence—or what seemed so—it re-appeared in a later conversation on the same day.

Sir Oliver Denys drove over from Sayes Court with Cousin Elizabeth Paul—a thing that he had not done for years. They were not expected, they were a great surprise, but a pleasant one, and Mrs. Denys showed

them her brightest face. Sir Oliver had avowed a lively admiration for her, which Cousin Elizabeth Paul did not scruple to communicate.

"He loves goodness from his very heart, and when it is matched with beauty and brains, he cannot find words to express his sentiments without borrowing from the poets. He has been quoting Milton all the way here—'Grace in her step, heaven in her eye, in all her accents dignity and love.'" Cousin Elizabeth paused, not very sure of her quotation.

Delia laughed and blushed, and was pleased of course. What tender woman but is pleased with kind opinions, especially when they are repeated with a frank endorsement?

"Hugh is in a hurry to be off to his

hunting—we know of old what Hugh's chief joys are," Sir Oliver said in reference to his invitation, which had been declined. "You have kept him here a month too long, Mrs. Denys."

"Wait a little. He will have his revenge," said Cousin Elizabeth Paul.

When they were sitting at luncheon Sir Oliver begun to tell them of a short autumn tour that they had made, Cousin Elizabeth and he, into Devonshire and Cornwall. "We returned through Beauminster, and saw Navestock," said he, and sighed as if he had seen something discouraging.

"And what thought you of Navestock?" Mr. Denys inquired rather sarcastically.

"I should like to restore the church and the parsonage-house."

"Pray, do what you would like then—I

shall not hinder you. I wish you could restore the parson as well," Mr. Denys said again, and now he laughed.

"I should prefer to transport him," Sir Oliver rejoined. "I think he deserves it."

"Did you ever see such dismal neglect and poverty as round that church?" Mrs. Denys remarked.

Sir Oliver answered that he had seen as bad or worse in many parts of England, but then his life extended a long way back—into the dark ages before the era of revivals in religion. Cousin Elizabeth Paul agreed with Delia—she had seen nothing worse, and could imagine nothing worse—she called it a sin and a shame in a Christian country.

"I am reputed very rich, and Navestock is in a state of beggary," Mr. Denys interposed, as if put upon his defence. "It was deeply indebted when poor Ralph and I

began fighting for it, and before the fight ended it was quite stripped and bare. I have done a little planting—a very little. But I shall do more. We have consented together, Delia and I, to draw nothing from Navestock, but to hold it in trust for the next generation, redeeming it as we are able. It will be a wearisome work. I have more land than one man can feel an interest in strong enough to make doing his duty by it the pleasure it ought to be. And I cannot sell an acre." Mr. Denys spoke hardly, as if in his own mind resenting incompetent criticism, or warding it off. He got up from his chair, and walked about with an air of losing patience, and an angry spark in his blue eyes.

Sir Oliver was silent, but Delia reached out a kind hand to her husband, and said prettily: "Never mind, Hugh dear. The

work will be lightened with me for chief bailiff."

"Bailiffs are all rogues," said Mr. Denys, but he was pacified, and his gust of ill-humour blew off with a laugh.

Sir Oliver would talk of Cote next, but he reverted to Navestock again presently as if the place were much in his thoughts. He wanted to be informed respecting the successive mortgages that had been raised upon it, and who held them; and then he wanted to be informed of the expense of draining and reducing to cultivation land that had never been broken up, and of getting into condition land that had suffered from neglect. His tone was that of a shrewd man of business aware that he is ignorant of certain matters, and anxious to be instructed. Mr. Denys was but too well qualified to instruct him.

The talk seemed to Delia very dry and tedious; but Cousin Elizabeth Paul, though she did not join in it, listened as if she was vitally concerned in remembering each particular; and once, when the younger lady would have engaged her on some feminine topic, she intimated that she had no attention to spare from that which occupied the gentlemen.

Suddenly Sir Oliver recurred to the church and the parish, left at such a cruel disadvantage by its defaulting rector.

"What is the bishop about that he does not disestablish the reverend rascal, who cannot live at home for fear of the constable, and give his benefice to somebody else?" he asked—obviously as little learned in ecclesiastical law as in agricultural processes, though his notions of pastoral discipline showed the true touch.

"The bishop is powerless to disestablish him, and the benefice is not in the bishop's gift, but in mine," Mr. Denys answered.

"Then why don't you disestablish him?"

"I am as powerless as the bishop, Sir Oliver. He was an agreeable, hospitable fellow, able to borrow some thousands of pounds from his wealthy neighbours, and those debts saved him. He had not confined his experiments to simple borrowing, and there was just a chance that he might be prosecuted for felony. But his conviction would have resulted in his deprivation, and he owed a lot of money. So he was let go, and the living was sequestrated."

"The mammon of unrighteousness stood his friend indeed! And who were the honourable men that sold justice for a small annual dividend?"

Mr. Denys did not say who they were,

though neither did he seem to view the transaction in the same severe light as Sir Oliver. Delia knew, and glanced from the one to the other, not perplexed, but troubled and annoyed.

"I wish gentlemen would not do such things," she said with a flush on her face. "How can they endure to sit as magistrates after, and send poor souls to prison and hard labour who have robbed, perhaps, for a shilling's worth?"

Sir Oliver's approval of Mrs. Denys was evident to her husband, who came over to her, and whispered that she was too good for this wicked world. Delia took no notice of the private communication, which was audible through the room, and the momentary silence was broken by a cheerful note of variety in the voice of Cousin Elizabeth Paul, asking Mr. Denys whether he was

cognisant of the fact there were in existence several lineal descendants of the ancient family that had been dispossessed of Navestock by Giles Denys of Cote.

"Of the Meades? Yes, it is very well known," he replied. "They have stuck to the county—Updeane is their place—and though they are much impoverished, they have never sunk below the rank of gentry. There have been men of high distinction amongst the Meades."

"Then, Hugh dear, wouldn't it be a fine thing to give them Navestock back? From what I see and hear, it is not likely to bring us either honour or profit," Delia cried out rather excitedly.

"That is a bright idea, my wife; but you forget the entail," said Mr. Denys; and Delia said, "Ah, yes, there was the entail."

Sir Oliver had inquiries to make next

respecting the law of entail, and in excuse of his imperfect knowledge of all such matters, he said that his experience had been earned far and wide in the world of merchants.

"The curse of Navestock is an old story that has got into books," he went on when Mr. Denys had sufficiently enlightened him. "I remember reading it on board ship when I was a lad, making my first voyage to China. We sailed round the Cape then, and I was rather proud of belonging to a family who inherited such a remarkable misfortune. I feel with Mrs. Denys now. I would be rid of Navestock to be rid of the curse."

Delia had not breathed a word of the curse, though the secret dread of it was what had impelled her to speak.

"You need not pinch off my little finger, Delia—*we* are not under the curse," said her husband, one of whose hands she had

laid hold of in her nervous agitation. "Ralph Denys at the Warren House is the last in that black entail—the final scapegoat of the sins of his fathers—the only male remaining of Giles Denys' seed, breed, and generation."

"You must never let poor Ralph want," Cousin Elizabeth Paul said at Mr. Denys' ear.

He gave her no answer, and Sir Oliver began to speak of the Meades, explaining how he had come to know of them.

"It was in the regular course of business," he said. "A young fellow presented himself at our office on the wharf, well recommended as a junior clerk. He was a bold, handsome stripling, and when he was asked what he could do, he answered gaily that he could ride, swim, and shoot at a mark. These accomplishments were of no use to us; and being told what the duties really

were, he just said: 'I would rather take the Queen's shilling.' 'Then go and take it,' said my partner; and the next news we heard of him was that he had enlisted in a cavalry regiment, and was off to India. Now, that was a lad of spirit."

"Yes—Guy Francis, the third son. These are rough times in India, and he has just been gazetted for a commission," Mr. Denys said. "The eldest has been to Australia and back—he has turned his mind to practical farming, after hanging about for a year or two at a loose end. There is another brother who has gone into the Church. Their father died some five or six years ago; their mother still lives at Updeane. They have had a struggle to keep their footing, but they have kept it."

"I admire that tenacity—much like our own at Acklam," said Sir Oliver.

It was inevitable that Sir Oliver Denys' much questioning about Navestock should suggest to its over-weighted proprietor the likelihood that a portion of his unemployed wealth might be devoted to its relief, but no pledge to that effect was either given or implied beyond what had been said of the ruinous church and parsonage-house.

On their road home to Sayes Court Sir Oliver again praised Mrs. Denys—her grace, her dignity, her sweet, wise ways with her husband; and Cousin Elizabeth Paul by her responses deepened his favourable impression.

Good purposes do not arrive at maturity of a sudden, but that Sir Oliver had that day determined on a great and good purpose, Cousin Elizabeth Paul felt sure. And she felt equally sure that her happiness and pleasure would consist in promoting it; for selfish objects she had none.

BOOK THE THIRD.

COTE UNDER THE OLD ORDER.

CHAPTER XVI.

ROUND THE MANOR HOUSE.

"Who is my neighbour?"
"He that showed kindness."

Mrs. Denys' imagination, which had flagged for a while under the frosty blight of disapproval amongst friends, re-bloomed in the sunshine of her bridal triumphs amongst strangers, and she went home to Cote indulging sanguine expectations of their renewal and continuance. But the expectations of a young, energetic, ambitious lady married to a gentleman of twice her age, who is not popular in his county, are apt to resemble the prelude to a rondo—a sweet.

clear melody, a promise of music in a sonorous chord or two, and then a whirl of tamely varied sounds, where the tune reels and falls and sighs, but never sings out again in the bright notes it sang at first, lifting up the heart with joyous, hopeful aspirations.

At the House with Golden Gables Lady Daventry, commenting on her grand-daughter's lively recitals of the gay doings in her honour amongst the wealthy citizens affiliated to Mr. Denys, remarked that if Delia could not have the best society in London, she seemed prudently inclined towards the second best, which was, perhaps, a good thing, and she feared that she might not find her way more easy to make in the country.

"That will be in part our fault," Delia's mother said. "But there is choice in the

country too," she added with a sigh. "If we do not hear of her at Knowle, we shall hear of her at Lingfield."

"Yes, and that will not be to her advantage. But Delia will never be satisfied to keep at home. 'Want of company, welcome trumpery'—that is what she will say."

Lady Daventry's prophecy might or might not come true, but Mrs. Denys was far from the temper ascribed to her yet. She had a great spirit and great patience, as she had proved already, when the end was one that her heart was set on compassing. She understood her position as giving her social duties to do, of which not the least important belonged to her visiting-list. The people who called and left cards at the Manor House had their civilities returned according to the canons of the politest society. Invitations were accepted,

and in due time invitations were issued and hospitalities dispensed which gave perfect satisfaction to the recipients. Mrs. Denys seemed not to be aware that her guests were derived less from the families of long standing in the county than from the floating population of immigrants for reasons of climate and economy, who lived in modest retirement, enjoying chiefly the pleasures of life that cost nothing. But when she came to compare the roll of her visitors with Cricket's roll of the neighbours to Cote of their own rank, she found some conspicuous omissions. Mrs. Denys made no sign that she knew of their existence. It was not in the power of persons she had never seen to wound her mind—only old friends could do that.

Sir John Herrick had spoken at Auldcaster of holding out a hand to Mr. Denys for his young wife's sake, and Delia's

mother had apprised her in a letter of his neighbourly intentions. He had intimated them to Delia herself also, when they met by chance in the woods at Navestock, and Delia looked for him with confident expectation until one day Lady Herrick called alone, walking up to the Manor House from Croft Cottage, where she was staying for a week with her married daughter, Mrs. Wilton. She told Delia that Danesmore was about to be closed for the winter : Sir John had been prescribed a good change for his health's sake, and they were going to seek it in Italy—in re-visiting old scenes. Then she laid down Sir John's card, and hoped that Mr. Denys and he would meet on their return.

"I wish we were ordered to Italy too," Delia cried out with the momentary petulance of a shame-faced vexation.

Lady Herrick looked away from her, and

round the beautiful drawing-room, touched to the heart by that cry which had a meaning for her deeper than the words. "What a charmingly comfortable old house this is!" she said, still avoiding Delia's face. "Mr. Denys has vastly improved it. You have seen my dear Jenny? I am sorry to be going abroad for her sake. Her husband is a confirmed invalid, and her days drag sometimes. I want you to be good to her while we are away."

Delia's brow cleared. To have this charge pleased her. "I will do what I can," she said. "Hugh is devoted to his hunting, and twice a week I have many hours to spare. Is she fond of a long walk? Cote is a lovely place for walks."

"I fear Jenny's long walks are over; she is not strong," her mother said. "Charlie Wilton anticipates that Cote will grow into

a town before many years. You must get him to show you his plans—I believe they are admirable. He is a civil engineer by profession; quite a genius in his way, but thrown out of work, and entirely laid aside now. He never had health, but Jenny loved him, and what could we do?"

"What could you do? you made the best of it," Delia said, with a piercing sense of regret that her own people had not done likewise.

When Mr. Denys heard of Lady Herrick's visit to his wife, and what she had said in leaving Sir John's card for himself, he paused on the news with a downward look of grave reflection.

Delia, who was watching his countenance, said: "What are you thinking of, dear Hugh?"

"Never mind," was his answer, and with

a gentle touch on her shoulder he went out.

Delia sat hushed, the tears flooding her eyes, but not overflowing. She knew that he was hurt, and wondered a little that Sir John had not made an effort to come, then checked herself with a sigh at the futility of wondering. Mr. Denys was as much galled as she was grieved. Some hopes that he had built on his marriage with her were not fulfilling themselves, and he referred the fault to her family. Mr. Luttrell, a gentleman of Beauminster of the same political colour as himself, had suggested in the proper quarter that having such extensive landed interests in the county, Mr. Denys ought to be in the commission; but some other gentleman of the rival political colour—Judge Daventry's colour—had answered that Colonel Hayman, who was chairman at the

sessions, would not sit on the bench with him: adding that unless they wanted to bring the law into contempt with the vulgar, it would be wise not to make men of his notorious character justices of the peace. This imputed worse than the truth, but it had the effect of silencing Mr. Luttrell, and making Sir John Herrick cautious. The early and long prejudice against Mr. Denys was like the mark of the plague on his door-post.

Mrs. Denys let her mother know how deeply injured she felt by Sir John Herrick's failing her—what Delia wrote to her mother was between themselves. She told her that Mr. Denys resented it, and that she feared it might tend to throw him back on his familiar associates before their marriage; for which she should be very sorry. To this her mother could say nothing but that she should be sorry too.

Mrs. Denys' fear proved to be well founded.

Speculative builders with a far sight to the future prosperity of Cote had repeatedly endeavoured to set on foot with Old Crump treaties for land at a low figure, but the agent had no disposition to deal with men of this class. What he wanted was the solid and permanent lessee, gentlemen like Mr. Essex-Brough who had come over to Cote with his wife while Mr. and Mrs. Denys were at Acklam, and had made a proposal for the purchase of the Glen House. Mrs. Essex-Brough coveted the house for its lovely site, and her husband was willing to pay at once the prodigious ground-rent that the Glen might be worth in half a lifetime. Mr. Denys had held off, not yet persuaded to let strangers into the house sacred to his beloved dead, and Mrs.

Denys had offered no word any way. She wished for neighbours at the Glen House, but not for these neighbours.

Crump was anxious for the acceptance of Mr. Essex-Brough's proposal as a good beginning of the sound material progress that his mind was bent on. It was not in the squire's power to prevent the owners of the small houses on the heights from selling their life-leases; he had only the pull over them in this, that he could refuse to extend the original term, which would make it less worth the while of new-comers to buy out the native proprietors. Two or three of them had lately received advantageous offers, and had come to Crump to hear what was to be done. Crump had first to be conciliated, and then he talked to his master, who was never to be approached on business.

This was the matter of their discourse walking together towards the village one morning at the end of November. The leaves were nearly all fallen, but Cote was famous for evergreens, and looking down upon it was like looking into a vast garden with the wide plain of the sea beyond. At a turn of the road where it came full into view the owner of it all paused and surveyed it. He was in a heavy humour—an unpropitious, dull humour.

"Let the reign of peace last our time, Crump," he said, and thrust his hands deep into his pockets as he gazed about. "We have done enough for posterity here. We have paid off the mortgages, and freed the estate."

"We have done something, sir. Four hundred a year—that was all you pouched at your coming to Cote. You might make

it four thousand, and more than four thousand, if you would hear advice, and look forward instead of backward. I wish you could be persuaded to see Mr. Wilton's plans."

"You must talk to my wife. She wants to hurry nothing. She is not in favour of changes."

"And about the Glen House, sir?"

"Cannot you let the Glen House alone?"

Crump glanced askant at his master, and muttered some crabbed incoherencies, to which Mr. Denys did not attend. It was only a question of time; the Glen House could not remain empty, and if it must have a tenant, he would have been glad now to bring Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough to Cote for the sake of their company, but he was aware that Delia did not like the lady. Crump also had found that out, and was careful how he moved contrary to Mrs. Denys' influence.

Mr. Essex-Brough had travelled when he was a bachelor. There was scarcely a famous city or accessible site in the civilised world that he had not visited. Mr. Denys had travelled too, and things to talk about are very desirable in the country where events are not happening every day. Then Mrs. Essex-Brough had connections at Cambourne, and was personally urgent in the negotiation because she wanted to change her locality for that neighbourhood. When Crump sent her presently a temporising letter, she got impatient, and wrote to Mr. Denys himself. Mr. Denys carried the letter to his wife—not altogether displeased to have that opening.

"You might have a worse neighbour. Mrs. Essex-Brough is not an ill-natured woman," he said.

Delia was perfectly gentle. "If you wish

it, dear Hugh," she replied, keeping her eyes down on the needlework that occupied her fingers, and trying, not very skilfully, to seem indifferent.

"I do not wish to press anything that you are set against. But a man must have somebody to speak to out of his own house."

"I understand that," Delia said, still in her neutral voice, but she was giving way.

Mr. Denys took a seat near her. "Listen, Delia. If Sir John Herrick had shown himself friendly, there would have been a bright look-out for us; but Danesmore leads the world in the peninsula, and our prospect is perhaps closed. Essex-Brough is not liked, but his wife has a heart. When Agnes was nursing my poor children she heard that we could get no ice, and she rode over from Beauminster to bring us some."

Delia was vanquished. "Then God bless her, Hugh! We will have her for a neighbour. Her loud voice and rough manners shall be forgiven her, because she is a merciful woman!" Down went the needlework to leave eyes and hands free to express a thrill of repentance. That was Delia. The touch of kindness made her kin to that strange lady who in all else was her very opposite, and opened her home to her with a willing welcome.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEW TENANTS AT THE GLEN HOUSE.

"Life lies within the present; for the past is spent and done with, and the future is uncertain."—ANTONINUS.

MRS. DENYS was not without diplomacy. Sir John Herrick's aloofness notwithstanding, she sought the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Wilton at Croft Cottage, and was prepared to be as good to Lady Herrick's "Jenny" as Jenny would allow. Mrs. Wilton was a sprightly, industrious young lady who acknowledged no need of anybody else to divert her when her dear "Charlie" was at her command. But many days he was ill, or out of humour, and then the wheels of life drave heavily.

These two had married for love, not having much else, and before the year was out he was invalided, and sent to the south coast to save his life. He thought it scarcely worth saving, but Jenny did not agree with him, and after two or three moves they finally settled down at Cote with a determination to make the best of it.

Their house and garden were of no pretensions, but there was a spacious upper room where Mr. Wilton could sit in the sun, and count the passers-by on the road below. On the table was always spread some plan or series of plans, and on these, and the greater things he had meant to do when he was a student, he would descant to Jenny by the hour together. Jenny listened, and executed a heap of fine needlework in the course of the twelve months, and was so excellent a wife that she did not consciously tire of

Charlie's everlasting grievance against the law of nature that had cut short his ambitious flight. But soon she felt a boon in the visits of Mrs. Denys beyond all hope and expectation. Mrs. Denys did not want to talk of clothes, company, and frivolities with her, but was ready to indulge Mr. Wilton with talk of his plans, and to follow him with an interest that refreshed his spirit even when it fevered his frame with overmuch excitement.

One afternoon he had out his grand scheme for the development of Cote, and explained it to her with an eagerness which Jenny could not moderate, though she knew that it would cost him dear. Delia inquired if Mr. Denys had seen it. Mr. Wilton said that Mr. Denys had not, but Old Crump had, and then he gave Crump a commendatory word for his sagacity.

"But you don't like his ways, Charlie?" Mrs. Wilton interposed deprecatingly.

"I don't like some of his ways, Jenny. But if he were owner of Cote instead of agent, I should not mind serving him as surveyor. The poor lameter has large ideas, and a capital notion of a road."

Mr. Wilton was too much in earnest to weigh his words, and Mrs. Denys made no sign of noting them. But she did note them, and in speaking to her husband of the plan afterwards she wanted to know what Crump's large ideas were. He told her that the chief of them was probably the adoption of this scheme of Mr. Wilton, for a new town at Cote. Delia said they might adopt it when the time came, but she prayed that it might not be yet.

"It need be never unless you choose it," Mr. Denys said. "Not a stone can be laid in

Cote without the leave of me. But I expect that Wilton will get round you as he has got round Crump."

The agent always let Mr. Wilton hear when any opening promised, and he did not lose an hour in apprising him that Mr. Essex-Brough's proposal for the purchase of the Glen House was acceded to. Mr. Wilton reported the event to his wife with as little delay.

"And our new neighbours are to be the Essex-Broughs, of all the unlikely people in the world!" cried Jenny, and let her fastidious tone and a slight movement of her eyebrows express what more she thought.

Her husband had his eye on her. "Now, Jenny, don't make mischief," said he with an air of serious warning.

"*I* make mischief, Charlie? If there is mischief it will not be of *my* making." The

firm closure of Jenny's lips signified that she had said her say, and had done for that time.

The news that Mr. Essex-Brough had bought a place at Cote spread. They heard it at the House with Golden Gables, and thought it of such evil portent that they said very little about it. Mrs. Essex-Brough was one of the two ladies to whom the judge had alluded as having been distinguished by Mr. Denys' attentions, and having sustained subsequently a slip between the cup and the lip.

Immediately on the signing of the agreement the new owners of the Glen House came in and took possession. Mrs. Denys had notice of their arrival one morning from Phœbe, who wanted to know what was to be done with a quantity of beautiful books and other things that had been sent

up to the Manor House by order of Crump.

The colour rose warmly in Delia's face: "Put them in the library until your master comes home," she said, and tried to go on writing the letter to her mother that Phœbe had interrupted.

But she could not keep her mind fixed. Her thoughts wandered. She heard feet passing backwards and forwards across the hall, and when they ceased, and all was quiet again, she went down to inspect these treasures from the Glen House, which she imagined her husband to have sorted out from the rest to keep. But she was mistaken in this. He had entrusted the task to Mrs. Essex-Brough, who had sent a note with them for him. Delia did not touch the note, but she turned over the books, mostly music-books and books of

sketches that told a long story, and filled some gaps in her knowledge of her husband's former life.

She had seated herself in his chair, and was reading the autograph notes in one of these volumes—a visit to Sicily recorded in a series of drawings by two hands—when he came into the room unheard. He saw how much she was absorbed, and felt for the moment disconcerted and half displeased; but Delia had no thought of offending, and though she blushed, she said quite naturally that some of the drawings were lovely.

"Yes. Those were by Agnes. George has her genius," he answered, and, restored to himself, drew up a chair to look over the book with her.

She turned a leaf. On the next page was a sketch of a beautiful cloister, mouldering and

weed-grown with an inscription below importing that there they had been on a certain memorable, sad anniversary. Delia continued to turn the leaves, and to make her own remarks, but Mr. Denys did not speak again until they came to the end of the volume, when he said that the colours were faded, and some of the notes illegible. But he took the book into his own possession. Delia reached out her hand for another—a book of songs bound in scarlet morocco, one of many.

"The boys will be pleased to see their mother's books again, Hugh. Shall we carry the music-books into the drawing-room?" she said, putting a constraint on herself to do what she believed right.

"Yes. They used to carol like the lark—they will make us a merry Christmas. Agnes had a most sweet voice too. You do not

sing, Delia—why don't you sing?" Mr. Denys' interest was not in his question—he was reading through one of the songs—a favourite song—and hearing the echoes of Agnes' "most sweet voice" in the well-remembered melody which he whistled softly as he read.

Delia answered in her literal way that she had never learnt to sing, that she had never learnt to draw.

"It needs a gift to sing as Agnes sang," he muttered when he had whistled his tune through—half absently, but showing that he had understood what she said.

Delia felt a pang that made her face glow, but her husband was not observing her, nor thinking of her. He took up Mrs. Essex-Brough's note, remarked that it required no reply, and the next moment sat down and began to write.

"We will have some music to-night, Delia," he said with a sudden animation. "They can have nothing comfortable at the Glen House yet—we will send the carriage, and they can come and dine with us. This is to bid her bring her music. Will you ring the bell? She has a glorious contralto. If you care for music at all, she will find the way to your heart."

Delia rang the bell. She was so liberal a housewife that no two or three impromptu guests could put her or her servants out of their way; and as Mr. and Mrs. Essex-Brough were to be their neighbours, she was willing to begin at once to be neighbourly—and the more because her husband was alive to her prejudice.

"Shall we invite the Wiltons to meet them? They don't care for long notice," she said, chiming in with his humour.

"No — I don't suppose they would have much to say to Wilton. They are going to pull the Glen House about, and to spend a lot of money, but they will employ Barry or Wyatt. They might make Wilton clerk of the works, perhaps," Mr. Denys answered, looking up consideringly.

Delia said no more. She did not think that Mr. Wilton would choose to be clerk of the works at the Glen House, but she would have liked Mrs. Wilton to interpose between her and the other lady, of whom she had a certain fear, which was not jealousy but leaned towards jealousy.

Mrs. Essex-Brough was a woman who surveyed her sex with a shrewd but not unkindly discernment. She was well aware that Mr. Denys liked her society, and conjectured that when it was near of access

he might seek it oftener than his young wife would approve—they had been a long while acquainted, and had many tastes and pursuits in common. That Mrs. Denys had put on her war-paint was her amused, silent remark to herself, on the instant of their meeting. Her own manner was effusive, and she bent her face at that angle which invites another woman's kiss, if kissing her female friends be her practice. It was not Mrs. Denys' practice. The pressure of her hand was warm and cordial enough, but she reserved her lips for the few whom she truly loved. As for what Mrs. Essex-Brough called her war-paint, that was not worn by way of defiance, and was only soft, natural blushes and the white dress in which she was married—a simple and inexpensive dress as comparison had taught her since—but she would have looked as lovely in calico. Mr. Denys was very proud of her, as

Delia knew, and her pretty, conscious graces were all for him.

Clever women are sometimes tempted to undervalue one another, and Mrs. Essex-Brough's weakness lay in this direction. The beauty of Mrs. Denys only envy could disparage, but this evening she was so quiet and slow to speak that her guests were confirmed in their first impression, that there was nothing in her. Delia was merely on her guard with persons whose measure she was not yet qualified to take.

Mrs. Essex-Brough sang, not so well as she had sung once, but still like an artist who has a good method and the name and fame of a singer. Delia had been more moved by less scientific music. She turned down the lamp in the recess of her window where she was sitting, and let the moonlight in. Mr. Denys looked round, and made her a sign to come to

him, but she shook her head, intimating that she preferred to be farther away from the piano.

Mr. Essex-Brough had cast himself into a lounging-chair, and lay prone, his head back and his eyes closed, lost, not in a paradise of sweet sounds as an incurious spectator might have imagined, but in a purgatory of physical pain. Delia knew the expression of pain, and pitied the grey face. If it had been a good face she would have said a word, but perhaps silence was better; for presently, when his wife came near, and whispered that she was sure he was very ill, he snarled, moved his foot impatiently, and bade her let him alone. It was a moment of revelations not easily to be forgotten. Delia motioned to the poor lady to take the other corner of her sofa, and for an instant their hands touched—they were at one just then.

The next minute Mrs. Essex-Brough broke into conversation, loud and fast in her habitual strain. It was about the Beauminster society, which had made her less than welcome. Delia knew a little of the Beauminster society, and her visitor was sensible soon of being held in, and her familiarity checked by Mr. Denys. She was not easily checked. When her spirits rose her audacity was alarming, and taking next the society of Cambourne, Cote, and all this her new neighbourhood, in hand, she drove through every conventional bar, paying no toll at all to propriety. She meant to show her wit, but Mrs. Denys could not or would not see it. Her aggressive sallies against the clergy especially astonished and hurt Delia, to whom her irreverent tone was strange and very repugnant. Once she rose, and walked away to the farther end of the room to avoid hearing what she could not reply to. Before she

walked back again Mr. Denys primed his old acquaintance with the information that his wife's ideas were of the orthodox pattern in morals and religion, including respect for the Church, and that he was satisfied to have them continue what they were.

Then their guests said good-night, and went home. Mr. and Mrs. Denys stood discussing them for a few minutes as entertainers do discuss retiring guests.

Delia said: "Mrs. Essex-Brough makes herself appear worse than she is, but she will never be a reproach to us by her delicate feeling or her high principle. And I am afraid that she can be a plague of a woman, Hugh."

"A plague of a woman? Interpret. I don't catch your meaning," Mr Denys said musingly.

"I am not sure that I can make it

clear to you, and perhaps it is not worth while."

"You don't like her, Delia; that is your meaning," he rejoined. "It is not necessary that you should see much of her, and you can neutralise her with other company when she comes—only remember that I owe her a debt of charity."

"I will never forget that, Hugh."

"The boys are fond of her. Lingfield has been a second home to them during their holidays at Navestock. She has a vast amount of energy and indomitable courage — I don't know how she would endure her life else. Essex-Brough makes it awful for her with the fits of moodiness that follow his paroxysms of pain. He suffers tortures—but she knew what was before her when she committed herself to that marriage."

"I felt she was not happy while I listened to her," Delia said in a hushed voice. She was very sorry for a woman who was married, and was not happy. She judged that not being happy, she must be most miserable.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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3 0112 060919732